

A
System of Divinity,
in
A COURSE of SERMONS,
on the
FIRST INSTITUTIONS of RELIGION;
On the BEING and ATTRIBUTES of GOD;
on some of the most important
ARTICLES of the CHRISTIAN-RELIGION,
in Connection;
And

On the several Virtues and Vices of Mankind:

with Occasional Discourses.

Being a Compilation from the best Sentiments of the polite Writers,
and eminent, sound Divines, both ancient and modern, on the same
Subjects, properly connected, with Improvements, particularly adapted
for the Use of chief FAMILIES and STUDENTS in DIVINITY;
and for CHURCHES, for the Benefit of Mankind in general.

Volume II.

By the Rev'd W^m DAVY. A. B.

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System of Divinity,

in

A COURSE OF SERMONS,

on the

FIRST FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION;

OF THE BEING AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD;

ON MAN, HIS NATURE, AND CONDITION;

AND OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION;

in



OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

By the Rev. John Owen, D.D.,
Professor of Divinity, and
Rector of St. Mary's Church,
Cambridge.

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1720.

S E R M O N S
on the
BEING and ATTRIBUTES
of **GOD.**

"And they shall teach no more every Man his Neighbour, and
"every Man his Brother, saying, **KNOW THE LORD**; for All
"shall **KNOW ME**, from the Least to the Greatest: for from the
"Rising of the Sun, even unto the going-down of the same, my
"Name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every Place, In-
"cense shall be offered unto my Name, and a pure Offering; for
"my Name shall be great among the Heathen, saith the Lord of
"Hosts." "The Earth shall be full of the Knowledge of the Glory
"of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea."

Jeremiah xxxi. 34. Heb. viii. 12. Malachi i. 11.

Isaiah xi. 9. Habakkuk ii. 14.

"HAVE FAITH IN GOD."

Mark xi. 22.

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Blank and Associates

of God.

Malachi i. 11.

Имя и отчество. Ф. И. О. 14.

"HAVE FAITH IN GOD."

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CONTENTS

VOLUME II

SERMON XIV.

Of the Omnipresence of God.

Psal. cxxxix. 6. "Whither shall I go from thy Presence?"

SERMON XV.

On the same Subject.

SERMON XVI.

Of the Eternity of God.

Psal. xc. 2. "From Everlasting to Everlasting, Thou art God."

SERMON XVII.

Of the Paternity of God.

Eph. iv. 6. "One God, and Father of all."

SERMON XVIII.

God, the first Cause, and last End of all Things.
 Rom. xi. 36. "Of Him, and thro' Him, and to
 Him, are all things; to whom be Glory forever."

30

Page 125

SERMON XX.

Of the Supreme Majesty and Dominion of God.

Rom. ix. 5. "Who is over all." — 146

SERMON XXI.

Of the Moral Government of God.

1 Bpalm cxviii. 9. "With Righteousness shall He
 judge the World." — 183

SERMON XXII.

On the same Subject.

On the same Subject. — 203

SERMON XXIII.

Of the Happiness of God.

Rom. ix. 5. "God, blessed forever." — 189

SERMON XXIV.

On the Omnipotence of God.

Pfalm cxlvii. 5. "Great is our Lord, and great
 is his Power." — 188

C O N T E N T S .

SERMON XXIV.

Of the Knowledge of God.

I. John, iii. 20. "God is greater than our Heart,
and knoweth all things." — Page 274

SERMON XXV.

On the same Subject. — — 303

SERMON XXVI.

Of the Wisdom of God.

Pfalm cxlvii. 5. His Wisdom is infinite." 323

SERMON XXVII.

On the same Subject. — — 345

SERMON XXVIII.

Of the Immutability of God.

Malachi iii. 6. "I am the Lord, I change not."

369

SERMON XXIX.

On the same Subject. — — 392

SERMON XXIV.

Of the Knowledge of God.
I John, iii. 20. "God is greater than our Heart,
and knoweth all things." — Page 274

SERMON XXV.

On the same Subject. — 303

SERMON XXVI.

Of the Wisdom of God.
Psalm cxlviii. 2. "His Wisdom is infinite." — 313

SERMON XXVII.

On the same Subject. — 342

SERMON XXVIII.

Of the Immortality of the Soul.
Malachi iii. 6. "I am the Lord, I change not." — 369

SERMON XXIX.

On the same Subject. — 392

ATTRIBUTES continued.

SERMON XIV.

Of the Omnipresence of God.

Psal. cxxxix. 6. "Whither shall I go then, from thy Presence?"

We live in a World which is full of the Divine Presence & Power.— We behold every where around us the Traces of that Supreme Goodness, which enlivens and supports the Universe. — "Day unto Day uttereth Speech, & Night unto Night sheweth Knowledge of it." Yet, surrounded as we are with the Perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand Objects, to confess his Presence, it is both the Misfortune and Crime of a great part of mankind, that they are Strangers to him, in whole World they dwell. Occupied with nothing but their Pursuits of Interest and Pleasure, they pass thro' this World, as tho' God were not in it. — the Virtuous and Reflecting, are peculiarly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habitual Sense of the Divine Presence which characterises the former. — To them Nothing appears void

of

of God. They contemplate his Perfections in the Works of Nature; and trace his Providence in the Incidents of Life. When retired from the World, he often employs their Meditation. When engag'd, in Action, he always influences their Conduct. Wherever a pious Man is, or whatever he does, (in the Style of Scripture,) "He is continually with God:" For, "whether can he go from his Presence?"

By which we are to understand, that God is present in all Places, so that wherever we are, there he is; which we may easily conceive from the Spirituality (A) of his Nature, which is infinite, and thereby capable of universal Inspection.

We cannot get from his Presence: "If we take the Wings of the Morning, & fly into the remotest Parts of the Earth," which are unknown to us yet would God be present there, and we should be equally led and up-holden by him.

By reflecting on ourselves, on the Constitution of our own Nature, with it's various Powers, Tendencies, Affections and Operations, which we perceive by our Senses, with their Relations & Dependencies, we are led to a Persuasion of the Existence, Power, Wisdom and Goodness of our Creator.

Indeed, by this Method of Inquiry, and Exercise

to

of

(A) The preceding Discourse.

Of the Omnipresence of God.

3

of our Understandings, we are convinced not only of the Divine Existence and Perfections, but that God is intimately present with us, in all places of the Universe; yet, it is only by the Means of sensible Effects, which are the direct Objects of our perceiving Faculties, that we attain to this Conviction.

The Divine Nature and Attributes themselves, the inward Principle of his various Operations, "no man hath seen at any time, nor can see."

We have much more distinct Apprehensions of the communicable Attributes of God, of his Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, than of those his other Characters, which are in no degree imparted to any dependent Being, such as his SELF-EXISTENCE and INFINITY.

The Latter are not, nor can possibly be represented by any Image; nor is the Notion of them conveyed by any discernable Effect: — The Other have produced a Resemblance of themselves in inferior Agents, and the Marks of them are engraven on all the divine Operations. It is impossible that the Condition of a Creature should lead us into the Notion, as containing in itself an Image, of uncaused Existence: That a temporary Being should give us an Idea of Duration without Beginning; or that a Body, circumscribed within certain Limits, should give us a clear Perception of Immensity.

Serm. XIV.

As

Of the Omnipresence of God.

As these are Attributes hardest for us to conceive, we shall therefore think and speak of them the most clearly & usefully, when, (as far as that can be done,) we consider them with Relation to the Works of God, which are the Means by which we attain to any Knowledge of him. — Thus particularly,

We have a much better Notion and Proof of the Divine Omnipresence, and more applicable to practical Purposes, when we consider it as filling the whole Universe, or the whole of created actual Existence, and not confined to any part of it.

In this View, we have a sufficient & clearer Proof of his Universal Presence from the Effects of his Wisdom, Power & Goodness, which he continually exerts in all places, thus manifesting forth his Perfections; than we sh'd, if we applied our Thoughts only to the abstract Speculation of intire, absolute Immensity, or existing in the whole of the extramundane, boundless Space. But,

Tho the Manner of God's Existence before the World was made, and of his being in infinite Space beyond it's Limits, now that it does subsist, surpasses our Understanding, yet we cannot help being convinced that he does so exist.

We have a sufficiently clear Idea of Space not filled with Matter: Indeed, demonstrative Evidence that

Of the Omnipresence of God.

5

that not only there must be an absolute Vacuity Within the Bounds of the corporeal System, but also WITHOUT it: For, the greatest corporeal Magnitude must be terminated: Indeed, we cannot remove out of our Minds the Idea of Immensity, (i.e.) of infinite Extension or Space, no more than we can of eternal Duration, tho we are far from being able to comprehend it. (A) Our Senses convey to us the Notion of Distance, we easily imagine a greater Distance than can be perceived by them; But, the Imagination, (endeavouring to grasp it's utmost Extent,) presently loses itself in an Object too large for it's Capacity, and all the Length it can proceed, is only to this Negative Conclusion, that no Limits can be set to it. But, whatever it is, or the Manner of God's Existence in it, we cannot avoid attributing Immensity to him. The Ideas of uncaused and unlimited Existence seem to be connected together, & he who comprehends all things, must be WITHOUT, as well as WITHIN them; his Essence can be circumscribed by nothing.

Still however, (as hath been already observed,) What we are sure of, and more clearly understand, is, that the Power & Wisdom, which stretch'd out the Heavens, and established the Earth, are infinitely

[(A) See Note (B) Vol. 1. page 232.]

imately near to them, & in all their parts: Which Notion of the Omnipresence of God, that it fills the whole Universe, continually preserving and governing it, as it is the most intelligible, so it is the most useful, tending to excite in our Minds the most becoming Affections towards the Supreme Being.

God, then, is a Being of immense Essence, infinite and present in all places, not limited in his Being and Operations to One Region of the Universe; he possesses the whole, as the sovereign disposing Cause, and supreme Ruler of all things.

Inthroned in Heaven, where the highest Orders of Created Beings dwell, & pay him their Homage, he exercises his Dominion in all places at once, by his own immediate Presence, powerfully preserving, and wisely superintending all things.

In speaking further to this Attribute of God, (his Omnipresence,) I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand by it.

(II. That this Perfection belongs to God. And,

Lastly, See what Improvements can be drawn from it. And,

First, His Majestic Presence, as surrounded with Light, and with an Host of Angels. In

In this Sense God is frequently said to "dwell on high," and Heaven is styled his Throne; he is said to "sit in Heaven," because he dwells there in Light inaccessible, and hath the holy Angels continually standing before him: there the Splendor of his Majesty, and his high Perfections shine most illustriously, in the View of those Creatures which are the best qualified to discern them. - There he receives the Homage of his holy Angels, and issues forth his Commands for the Government of the World. This is, (as St. Jude expresses it,) "the Presence of his Glory;" and, in this sense, the Psalmist saith, "in thy Presence there is Joy;" and the Apostle, that "Christ is entered into Heaven, now to appear in the Presence of God for us." (A) But,

Secondly, his Providential Presence, as when he is in a special & extraordinary manner present to exert his Power, or give some other Demonstration of his Providence towards the sons of men; &, in this sense he is present; First, in a way of Judgement to chastise sinners: Thus did he appear to exercise his tremendous Judgements on Pharaoh and his Host, who followed the Israelites into the Red Sea; and on Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, with the two hundred

(A) See this more fully in No. 520 of the Spectator: (A)
Serm. XIV.

hundred and fifty men that offered Incense with them: And, thus God represents himself to his own People as one that went before them as a consuming Fire, to destroy their Enemies, whilst his Servants obey'd him. (A) But,

Thirdly, this Presence is more frequently mentioned in a way of Mercy and Favour to his people.

It is highly probable that he who required Services and received Sacrifices from men, from the Beginning, gave them some visible Token of his Presence with them, when they met to serve him, For,

Tho God is not present now in the Assemblies of his Saints in such a visible and extraordinary manner as then he was; yet, we have still sufficient Reason to expect his gracious Presence by the effectual Operations of his Holy Word and Spirit.

Our Lord himself hath promised, that "where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there he is in the midst of them:" And, that "he would be with his Ministers, teaching the things which he had commanded them, alway, even to the End of the World."

St. Paul also hath assured us that "when he ascended up on high, he gave some Apostles, some Prophets

(A) See No. 565 of the Spectator.

Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastors & Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man." Again,

The Scripture saith that God is present every where by his Power and Essence; whence this is stiled his Essential Presence: And, of this Presence the Psalmist treateth in the Words before us, where he speaks of the Presence which cannot be avoided by our ascending into Heaven, or by our descending into Hell, or the Grave, "where all things are forgotten, and where the Dead are invisible: or by our flight into the remotest parts of the Earth," or even the lowest place of the great and profound Deep.

So that from hence we may observe this Doctrine, that tho' God's glorious Presence be in Heaven, yet is he also every where present, by virtue of his Power and Essence, (i.e.) he is so present in every place, that nothing can exclude him from being present with us." In this sense, the Wise Man expresses it, "The Eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the Evil and the Good."

Serm. XIV. When

When we are in our secret Closets, He hears us; or in our secret Chambers, (doing Deeds of Iniquity,) He cannot be excluded from us: For, his Enquiry runs thus: "Can any hide themselves in secret places, where I cannot find him? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, (saith the Lord)?" - "There is not a Thought conceived in our Hearts, but He knoweth it altogether;" for, "he knoweth our Thoughts long before they are conceived in us, & spieth-out all our ways."

The Darknes may cover us from the Eyes of men, when we are doing Deeds of Darknes, but it can never conceal us from God's all-seeing Eye, to whom "the Darknes & Light are both alike."

He is present in all Places, so that we cannot get beyond him. He is so present in all places, both in Heaven and Earth, as not to be confined to any; so that we cannot say, "hither he reacheth, and no further;" for, He fills Heaven and Earth: And, if there be any Place beyond them, "He is there also." (A)

By the Omnipresence of God, therefore, we are to under-

(A) *Supra Mundus Deum non capit.*

— — — *Deum namque ire per omnes
Terrasque, Trausque Maris, Caelumque profundum.*

See No. 565 of the Spectator, as before.

explained.

11

understand that his Being hath no Bounds nor Limits, But doth every where diffuse itself beyond what we can imagine, so that we cannot say, "Be here, or Be there, or, thus far shalt thou come, and no further," for he is every where present, after a most infinite manner; this Attribute of his, being a Perfection, whose Centre is every where, and Circumference no where. (A) Not even the most private Recesses, or distant Places, are without him. But,

Of this Omnipresence of God, in this infinite Manner, we must at the best, have very incomplete and imperfect Ideas; but, that should not hinder us from endeavouring at the clearest and most distinct Conceptions of it, we can. Now,

God being a Spirit, distinct from Matter, is not, therefore, like it, confined to any particular place, but being Active and Intelligent, hath the free and unlimited Exercise of all his Powers. We know by Consciousness the Existence of our own Spirits, how by their Operations they extend their perceptive and active Faculties to all the parts of the system which they animate.

From this we may take our Rise to a Notion of the

(A) The Creator of the World can be under no Confinement to any place in it. Sermon. XIV.

Of the Omnipresence of God.

the Divine Omnipresence, and conceive of it as a comprehensive Knowledge in the Deity, of the whole Universe and every part of it, exercising an absolute and uncontrollable Power over all. (A)

As to the particular Manner of his being immense or every where present, in Opposition to the Manner of Created Things being present in such & such finite Places. This is as impossible for our finite Understanding to comprehend or explain, as it is to form an adequate Idea of Infinity. Yet, that the Thing is true, that God is actually Omnipresent, we are as certain, as we are that there must be something infinite; which no Man, who has ever thought upon these Things at all, ever denied.

Some, in their Disquisitions on this Subject, have presumed to assert, that the Immensity of God is a Point, as his Eternity, (they think,) is an Instant. But, this being altogether Unintelligible, That which we can more safely affirm, & which no Atheist can say is absurd, and which nevertheless is sufficient to all our purposes, is this: That

carry us further than any other thing whatever, to form just and true Notions of God. — We perceive what Thought is, and the Extensiveness of it; and from thence may easily rise an Idea of a Mind that sees all things with a clear and full Intuition, upon the surest Prospect, and with the perfectest Reason, having a constant Perception of all things ever present to it. This Idea does so genuinely arise from what we perceive of the Perfections of our own Minds, that a very little Reflection will help us to form it to a very high Degree.

the whole Body; so, in the Universe, there is One
conscious intelligent Nature, which pervades the
whole system; at once perceiving in every place, &
presiding over all, yet in an infinitely more perfect
Manner, & free from those Infirmities which attend
our Constitution.

What appears easily conceivable on this Subject,
(because our own Consciousness furnishes us with
some Resemblance of it in ourselves,) is, that the
same simple Being may exert it's perceptive and ac-
tive Faculties at the same time, in different parts
of Space. And, if this can admit of no Difficulty,
because we have an Example of it in our own
Minds, which perceive and operate in all parts of
the Body; then, to complete the Idea of Omnipre-
sence, we need only enlarge our Notion of Space,
which is the Sphere of active Intelligence, to the
whole Extent of the Universe, and we cannot, in
Reason, avoid apprehending that God is wherever
he exercises his Power and Understanding; tho the
Manner of his Presence is to us, incomprehensible.

One false Imagination ought carefully to be
avoided, which may be apt to arise in our Minds,
from our Method of forming the Notion of the
Divine Omnipresence; (viz.) that the Multiplicity
of Objects which engage the Attention of the
Supreme Understanding, may embarrass it.

Serm. XIV.

This

that which is in Place and created Being, can be present but in One definite Place at Once and Corporeal Beings even in That One Place very imperfectly and unequally, to any Purpose of Power and Activity, only by the Successive Motion of different Members and Organs; The Supreme Cause on the contrary, being an Infinite and most Simple Essence, and comprehending all things perfectly in himself; it is AT ALL TIMES EQUALLY present, both in his Simple Essence, and by the Immediate and Perfect Exercise of all his Attributes, to EVERY POINT of the Boundless Immensity, as if it were really all but one Single Point.

It is not intended by this, &c. (under) of each angel's being in Objection to the Virtue as to the beneficial Virtue of the being immense

It is not intended, by this, to represent God as the Soul of the World, (which is a very low & unworthy Notion of the Deity). He had the same immutable Being, Power & Wisdom before it was made, and is not now confined to it; tho the Manner of his Existence in immense Space, is what we have no Idea of. It is only intended by this imperfect Image, to assist our weak Understandings in forming a Conception of his intimate Presence with, and universal Care over all things in the World, preserving it, and wisely superintending it's Affairs; that as in us there is One individual, conscious Self, that sees, and hears, and feels, and determines for the

(A) The liveliest Way of framing an Idea of God, is, to consider our own Souls, which are said to be made "after the Image of God."

An Attentive Reflection on what we perceive in ourselves, will carry us further than any other thing whatever, to form just and true Notions of God. — We perceive what Thought is, and the Extensiveness of it; and from thence may easily rise an Idea of a Mind that sees all things with a clear and full Intuition, upon the surest Prospect, and with the perfectest Reason, having a constant Perception of all things ever present to it. This Idea does so genuinely arise from what we perceive of the Perfections of our own Minds, that a very little Reflection will help us to form it to a very high Degree.

the whole Body; so, in the Universe, there is One consubstantial intelligent Nature, which pervades the entire System; at once perceiving in every place, & presiding over all, yet in an infinitely more perfect Manner, & free from those Infirmities which attend our Constitution.

What appears easily conceivable on this Subject, (because our own Consciousness furnishes us with some Resemblance of it in ourselves,) is, that the same simple Being may exert it's perceptive and active Faculties, at the same time, in different parts of Space. And, if this can admit of no Difficulty, because we have an Example of it in our own Minds, which perceive and operate in all parts of the Body; then, to complete the Idea of Omnipresence, we need only enlarge our Notion of Space, which is the Sphere of active Intelligence, to the whole Extent of the Universe, and we cannot, in Reason, avoid apprehending that God is wherever he exercises his Power and Understanding; tho' the Manner of his Presence is to us, incomprehensible.

One false Imagination ought carefully to be avoided, which may be apt to arise in our Minds, from our Method of forming the Notion of the Divine Omnipresence; (viz.) that the Multiplicity of Objects which engage the Attention of the Supreme Understanding, may embarrass it.

Serm. XIV.

This

This Mistake is occasioned by our being accustomed so much to think of the narrow Human Capacity, which, not being able to take in a great Variety of Objects at once, finds itself obliged to divide the Superintendence of different Matters to different Agents; and it is certainly Wisdom so to do: but it is a Wisdom which at the same time implies Weakness. Whereas, it is a Perfection appropriated to the self-existent, unlimited Being, the first and great Cause of all things, to comprehend the whole Universe at once; and to govern it without Perplexity or Confusion.

Another Error equally to be avoided, (in regard to the Doctrine before us,) is, the Scruples of such as have been afraid to acknowledge the true Notion of the Divine Omnipresence, lest they should seem to diminish from the Glory and Majesty of God, by supposing him always to be actually present in all, even the most impure places. (A)

They

(A) It would be extremely weak to imagine that the Difference we make by our Senses, either external, or internal, between places as pure and impure, should at all affect the Supreme Being. For, what we call Uncleaness, (not Moral, but Natural,) is only Relative, depending wholly on the Frame of our bodily Organs, which determine sensible Qualities, (i.e. the Images or Representations made on our Minds from the exterior Surface of corporeal Objects. An intelligent Being

They who have raised to themselves this difficulty, have not been aware, that as the Beams of the Sun are not at all soiled by the Matter upon which they shine; and as the Purity and Holiness of the Divine Nature is not in the least diminished by beholding all the Wickedness and Moral Impurity which is acted in the World, so the Omnipresent Essence of God is not at all affected by any Natural Impurity of things or places whatever, it being the superlative Excellency & Prerogative of his Nature, to act always, every where, upon All things; and itself to be acted upon by Nothing.

As to Moral Turpitude, tho' we are made with an Abhorrence of it, producing strong Emotions and painful Sensations in our Minds, such as Shame, Sorrow and Resentment, which is a wise part of the human Constitution, being a designed Preservative against the greatest Evils and Unhappiness; yet, we ought not to imagine that the Deity is affected with

these, with Organs otherwise made, or rather, indeed, without any Material Organs at all, would not receive the same Impressions from the Bodies called impure, which we do; nor be affected with their Nearness, as we are: Especially that pure Spirit, who perceives not as Man does, by external Appearances of things only, but by their inmost Essences, cannot receive Offence or suffer Uneasiness like what we feel, from that which is called Defilement, which is a merely sensible Idea.

with it in the same manner as we are. He sees Moral Evil, and is present where it is committed, without any Participation in it, & disapproves without being made uneasy by it. He preserves his Creatures, moral Agents as well as others, and exercises that Care over them which their dependent Natures severally require; supporting their active Powers; which is necessary to their Exertion, even when they are acting irregularly, yet without any Concurrence in the Irregularity, or any Perturbation arising from it: which, tho' it be a manner of Presence and Acting, that we are not capable of, by the limited Condition of our Nature, and the special Laws of our Constitution, yet is not difficult to be conceived concerning the Supreme Being, if we consider his absolute Perfection and Blessedness, far above the possibility of being misled into any Error, or touched with any painful Passion.

The Subject being thus far advanced, I proceed,

II. To prove that this Attribute belongs to God.

This will evidently appear to us, whether we consult natural Reason, or divine Revelation.

That God is Omnipresent is sufficiently evident, from the natural Notions & Dictates of our Minds.

proved from Reason.

17

In order to prove the Truth of the Assertion itself, that "God must of necessity be Omnipresent," it is to be observed, (and it may easily be apprehended by the meanest Capacities,) that if Being or Existence be at all a Perfection, (as it is manifestly the Foundation of all other Perfections,) it will follow, that to exist through larger Periods of Time, and Portions of Space, is, the having a greater Degree of this Perfection. And,

As that Being, (which is absolutely perfect,) must, with regard to Duration, be Eternal; so, in respect of Greatness, must likewise be Immense; otherwise it's Perfections will be limited, which is the Notion of Imperfection.

He, therefore, who will frame to himself a true Idea of this divine Attribute, (so far as a finite Understanding can comprehend what is infinite,) must in this, as in all other of the divine Perfections, form in his mind the compleatest Notion of them; and, by enlarging this Perfection to it's utmost possibility, must consequently ascribe to God, (the most perfect of Beings,) Infinity and Immensity, (i.e) we must conceive of him as of a Being that fills all things, and that contains all things within it's own boundless Nature, and, that it is not defined or circumscribed by any Space, but co-exists with, and is present with all things, infinitely beyond whatever

Serm. XIV.

we

we can imagine, without Limits & without Bounds,
 (A) "in whom, (as the Apostle expresseth it,) we
 live, and move, and have our Being," and in whom
 all things subsist.

We find that the Heathens, (by the Light of Nature,) did attribute this Perfection to God, for, say they, "God is, as it were, a Soul passing through, and inspiring all Nature." — Again, "Men ought to believe that the Gods see all things, and that all things are full of them." — "He is every where present, and at hand hand." — "Which way soever we turn, we shall find him meeting us." — "Nothing is without him, for he every where fills his own Works." Not much differing from the Expression of the Psalmist in the Text. Again,

The World & all things in it tend & con-center to it. As God made the World, & still governs it,
 it

(A) Since we have sufficient Evidence of Wisdom and Design in the Formation and Government of the World, and since this appears in every Work of Nature, which we have any Knowledge of, we have the same reason also to conclude the like concerning those which are least known to us.

If the Motions of the Sun and Moon, and all the Phenomina of Nature, manifest the Counsel and Power of One universal Cause, who can doubt but the same active Intelligence rules in distant Worlds and Systems beyond ours, if there be any such, even to the utmost Bounds of possible Existence.

it must necessarily follow that he must be ever present with it. Our Reason must convince us, that he who works in all places must be where he works; in being inconceivable how any thing should operate where it is not, especially in such a Being, whose Operations are not easily distinguished from his Essence.

Since then God is every where present, by the Effects of his Power, as all men acknowledge, by Praying in all Places, for his Assistance, he must be also present with them by his Essence.

Moreover, since he is present by his Providence, preserving, moving, & directing all his Creatures, (2) seeing the Exercise of his Providence seems plainly to require the Knowledge of all things, & the Power to do all things, it seems plainly to require his Essential Presence.

To have a perfect Knowledge of, and the Power, to do all things; even those things which are most secret, & which depend upon the inward Motions of a Man's Heart; & so have a perfect Care of them, seems

(3) Gravitation, and the like, such as successive and similar Generation, &c, which we commonly call "The Laws of Nature," are really no more than a constant Series of uniform divine Operations upon Matter, whereby it's parts cohere in their regular Forms, and

and for their Ends. "The Universal Cause Acts not by partial, but by general Laws."

seems plainly to require Immediate Presence.

In a Word, He who made all things, as he could not but be before the things that he made; so he must be present also with the things that he made and governs. For,

Things could not be without the actual Presence of the Power that made them; nor can any thing be governed with any Certainty, unless the Wisdom that governs them be also present with them.

Whatever Arguments therefore prove the Being of God and his unerring Providence, must be understood to prove likewise his actual Omnipresence.

God then is, & must be intimately near to all his Works, upholding them by his Power, & conducting them by his Wisdom, thus manifesting his eternal Power and Godhead. But further,

He who exists by Necessity of Nature, (which is the Character of God,) must manifestly exist in all Places alike; for, absolute Necessity is, at all times, and in all places, the same. ^(A) Whatever can be absent at any time, may be absent at all times; And whatever can be absent from one place, may also

depending on any Outward Cause; it is evident it must be *every where*, as well as *always*, unalterably the same. For, a Necessity which is not every where the same, is plainly a Consequential Necessity only, depending upon some External Cause, and not on an Absolute one in its own Nature. For a Necessity absolutely such in itself, has no Relation to Time or Place, or any thing else. Whatever therefore Exists by an Absolute Necessity in its own Nature, must needs be Infinite as well as Eternal.

In Immenſity, be Omnipreſent. (A)

Concerning the Manner how God is preſent every where, we cannot poſſibly form to ourſelves any clear Notion.

We are, indeed, ſenſible that we have Souls, (which think and act, and are preſent where they think and act; (B) and yet the Manner in which they are preſent, is unknown, even to themſelves. If, therefore, to ourſelves We are unknown, how much more ignorant muſt we be of the Immenſity of the Almighty?

It is in vain to attempt what is unſearchable. All that we can do, is, to avoid falſe and unworthy Notions concerning it.

We muſt not imagine that God hath any viſible Parts or Shape, or is preſent in a bodily Manner, or that he is more preſent in one place than another, being, (in himſelf,) wholly a pure Mind, and thereby capable of infinite Inſpection.

When (A) As God cannot but be, ſo he cannot but be every where: For, there is nothing in any one part of Space to confine his Preſence to that, rather than to any other.

(B) *Ut Aves celeritate Montes, Colles, Maria et Scopulos tranſvolant, Ita etiam, Mens Humana per Univerſa ſibiſſe diſcurrit.*

The Mind of Man is not only an Image of God's Spirituality, but his Infinity. It is a Subſtance of a boundleſs Comprehension. Nothing does more diſcover the Soul's Infinity than Thought.

Serm. XIV.

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He who exists by Necessity of Nature, (which is the Character of God,) must manifestly exist in all Places alike; for, absolute Necessity is, at all times, and in all places, the same. (A) Whatever can be absent at any time, may be absent at all times; And whatever can be absent from one place, may also be absent from another; and consequently, can have no Necessity of existing at all.

He, therefore, who exists Necessarily, must necessarily exist Always, and Every-where, (i.e.) as he must, in Duration, be Eternal; so must he also

in

(A) The Idea of Infinity and Immensity, as well as of Eternity, is so closely connected with that of Self-Existence, that because it is impossible but Something must be Infinite *independently and of itself*, (for else it would be impossible there should be any Infinite at all, unless an Effect could be perfecter than its Cause;) therefore it must of Necessity be Self-Existent: And because Something must of Necessity be Self-Existent, therefore it is necessary that it must likewise be Infinite. To be Self-Existent, is to Exist by an absolute Necessity in the Nature of the Thing itself. Now, this Necessary Being will exist in itself, and not depending

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The Mind of Man is not only an Image of God's Spirituality, but his Infinity. It is a Subſtance of a boundleſs Comprehension. Nothing does more diſcover the Soul's Infinity than Thought. (C)

Serm. XIV.

When any thing is said of God's particular Presence, in Scripture, the Meaning is, that extraordinary Manifestations of his Glory were there made. (A)

The justest Notion, therefore, that we can form to ourselves of God's Omnipresence, is, that he is present every where in Knowledge and Power, (i.e.) that he knows all things, & that he every where can do all things. — "Can any hide himself in secret places that I cannot see him? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord?"

What hath been already said concerning the right Notion of the Omnipresence of God, will very much assist us to obviate their Objection, who deny the general Inspection of God's Providence over his Creatures.

This is a Mistake, arising from the want of having a true Notion of the Attribute before us. For,

This Perfection being once rightly understood, it cannot but be evident, but that all things are alike easy to be inspected by him, the minutest as well as the greatest: Indeed, it will appear, that not only the smallest things are not unworthy of his Inspection, or tedious for him; but that even, (in the Nature of things,) it is absolutely impossible but that he, who is every where alike present, should observe

(A) See Vol. 1, page 393, &c.

serve and attend to every thing alike : For, where-
ever Life is, it will operate ; and therefore, if God,
who is all Life & Activity, be every where, he must
operate every where ; & if he operates every where,
that Operation is an Universal Providence.

There is a certain determinate Number or Quan-
tity of things, which every intelligent Creature,
(according to the Proportion of it's Sphere of Power
and Activity,) is able to attend to. And, by this
we may judge, that as Creatures of larger Capacities
can observe a much greater Number of things at
one and the same time, than Beings of a lower
Rank can imagine it possible they should ; - so God,
who is completely perfect, & present every-where,
can, with infinitely greater Ease, direct and govern
all things in the world at once, than we, or even
the wisest among us, can attend to those few things
which fall within the Compass of our short Obser-
vation. But,

Secondly, This Omnipresence of God is with the
greatest Clearness testified to us in the Holy Scrip-
tures, which are the Rule of our Faith.

The Scripture saith expressly, that we cannot
possibly avoid either his Knowledge or Presence ;
nor get into that place, though ever so remote from

Heaven, where his Hand cannot reach us; & therefore God speaks thus to the Idolaters, "tho' they dig into Hell, thence shall my hand take them; tho' they climb up into Heaven, yet thence will I pull them down;" And, in the words before us, "Whither shall I go then from thy Presence?" Again,

There are Expressions which assure us that God fills Heaven and Earth, and therefore cannot be confined to any place. Thus,

When God filled the Temple with his glorious Presence, Solomon speaks in Admiration of him, "Behold the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain him, how much less the Place that I have built?"

And, God himself speaks thus by his Prophet: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I cannot see him? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth?"

Now, Knowledge is not said to FILL, but Presence only. And, of like Nature are those Words, "Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth is my Footstool." Again,

There are Expressions which assert this Presence of his with us all, (viz.) "Am I a God at hand, & not afar off?" Again, "God is not far from any of us; for in him we live, & move, & have our Being."

Now, He that doth constantly preserve, sustain, and move us, must be forever with us.

God,

God,

God, then, "fills Heaven and Earth," not limited in his Being and Operations to One Region of the Universe: He possesses the Whole, as the sovereign disposing Cause, and supreme Ruler.

Inthroned in Heaven, where the highest Orders of created Beings dwell, & pay him their Homage, He exercises his Dominion in all places at once; not mediately, by the delegated Power of others, but by his own immediate Presence, He powerfully preserves, and wisely superintends all things.

SERMON XV.

On the same Subject.

Pſalm . cxxxix . 6 . "Whither ſhall I go then from thy Preſence?"

Having already proved the Omnipreſence of God, in that Senſe which is moſt important & moſt uſeful, (i.e) not the abſolute Immenſity of his Nature, of which our Notions muſt be very inadequate, but his being at Once in all Parts of the Univerſe, and intimately near to all his Creatures — I ſhall now,

Laſtly, ſee what Improvements can be made from what hath been thus ſaid. And here,

This Doctrine is profitable for Information and Inſtruction, for Exhortation and Conſolation. As,

First, Is God omnipreſent? Then hence it follows, that he is to be worſhipped & revered in Private as well as in Publick, -- every where.

Honour is to be paid him, not only by Angels before him in Heaven, and by the Congregation, publickly in his Temple on Earth, but alſo by every
Man

Man sing'y. in his most private Retirements' (A)
 God

(A) Great indeed is the Excellency and Advantage of Publick Devotions, as they testify our common Reverence of the Divine Being, as they are best fitted to implore, or to acknowledge publick Blessings, and as they excite a publick Emulation in the Benefits of sincere Worshipers. However, in some Respects, they must yield the Pre-Eminence to Private Prayer; particularly in this, that they are not so well calculated as That to procure Ease & Repose of Conscience to the Sinner, and to adjust particular Accounts between God & our own Souls. For, it is of especial Use to this Purpose in these three Respects: As it affords us the best Opportunity of being fixed, fervent and circumstantial in our Addresses to God.

In the solemn Service of the Sanctuary, let us endeavour never so much to prevent Distractions; we shall sometimes be sensible of them: outward Objects will break in upon our Sense, and divert the Application of our Minds; even the Length of the Office, and the daily Return of the same Forms, will, to persons not rightly qualified & disposed, occasion spiritual Labours and Wanderings. And, this is not the Case only of Rigid Forms: The same Inconvenience doth, in a much higher Degree, belong to unpremeditated Prayer: The Hearers of which must first judge of the Fitness, both of the Matter and the Expression, before they can reasonably join in what they hear. And thus the Novelty of the Phrase, instead of fixing, breakes and divides the Attention of a sincere Worshipper. His Curiosity, indeed, may be awakened by this Means; but his Devotion is certainly checked and suspended. Now,

These Obstacles and Inconveniences are all removed and prevented when we pray in Private. We are then placed immediately under the Eye of God, and in the Neighbourhood of no other Objects, to divert and discompose us. We are at Liberty to employ that part of our Time in the Performance of this Service when we find ourselves best disposed for it, to make Choice of our own Thoughts, and our own Words, such as are best suited to our present Necessities and Desires.

(A) "God dwelleth not in Temples made with hands;"

(A) i.e. he is not present there only, but sees also that more retired part of our Behaviour which is concealed from the World, & most of all approves that private Piety and Virtue which cannot proceed but from a sincere Mind, because it is not capable of the Applause of men.

Our And, what is thus passing within ourselves, we cannot but perceive & attend to — We may break-off from the Duty whenever we find our Attention flag, and return to it at a more seasonable Opportunity.

Nor are we capable, at such Times, of being more fixed only, but likewise more fervent and enflamed. True Religion is ever modest and reserved in its Demour, when it appears in public; jealous of doing any thing that may savour of Vanity and Ostentation; unwilling to allow itself in any such Earnestness of Speech, & Singularity of Behaviour, as may call off the Eyes or Ears of others to observe them: it contents itself, for the most Part, with a composed & serious Look, with a plain and unaffected Carriage. But when public Regalia and Re-

ceptions are before them, they find much more Comfort as they would have done, had they been at Liberty to dwell upon it, and confess it in all its Aggravations. This Liberty, their Closet, and that alone, can afford them. There they may expatiate as much as they please upon their Wants and Unworthiness: There they may pour-out all their Complaints to God, and lay-open all their Griefs and Fears, and send-up all their Thanks and Acknowledgements: There Importunities are not forbidden, nor Repetitions unbecoming; but they may persist "knocking till it be opened to them, and asking till they obtain;" thus "taking Heaven (as it were) by Violence."

(A) To imagine that the Deity "dwells in Temples made with Hands," (as if his Presence was appropriated to them,) is a very unworthy

Our Saviour, therefore, enjoins his Disciples, (that they might have the clearer & more satisfying Evidences of Sincerity in their own minds,) to choose the greatest Secrecy for their private Worship. "When thou prayest, enter into thy Closet, & pray to thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in Secret, shall reward thee Openly," (A) being more especially pleased with that undissembled Piety, which honours him as an Omnipresent God. But further,

From

Worthy Notion. Indeed,

As publick Worship is reasonable, and appointed by God, it follows that proper Places should be provided for it. But, this is only for the Conveniency of the Worshippers, & not as if God was more accessible, or better disposed to hear Prayers and accept Services, in one place than another. Indeed,

According to the more pure and spiritual Form of Religion, (as instituted by our Saviour,) we are assured, that wherever Men "worship in Spirit and in Truth," - wherever they call upon God out of a pure Heart and Faith unfeigned, "fearing him and working Righteousness," they are accepted. Indeed, excepting the Reason already mentioned, (the Conveniency of numerous Assemblies, which only relates to the publick Worship,) to make Choice of Places for Devotion, as imagining greater Sanctity in some than others, is, at best, but Superstition; and to be imputed to a vain hypocritical Pretence of Zeal, which the God of Truth never approves.

(A) As Secret Wickedness will be openly punished, so will Secret Duties be openly rewarded, before Men and Angels at the last Day.

Serm. XV.

(A) "God dwelleth not in Temples made with hands;"

(A) i.e. he is not present there only, but sees also that more retired part of our Behaviour which is

strains are taken off, the pious Soul may then let itself loose into the highest Fervours of Zeal, into the freest Raptures of Thought, & into a suitable Vehemence and Warmth of Expression: there is no Sort of Holy Address, which it is not then allowed to make-use of; no outward Signs of Devotion & Reverence, which it may not then decently abound in.

There is yet another, &c. (under)

There is yet Another great Advantage that attends our Private Devotions: They give us Leave to be as express and particular as we please in our Representations: In the Church, the Sinner and the Saint, Men of all Rank and Distinctions, and Attainments in Virtue, must join in the same common Forms; and tho each of them may, by a sudden Glance of Mind, adapt the general Words to his own Circumstances, yet one Branch of the Service presses too fast upon another to admit of any Pause between them; They, therefore, who lie under the Load of any particular Guilt, rise not from their Knees with so much Comfort as they would have done, had they been at Liberty to dwell upon it, and confess it in all it's Aggravations. This Liberty a their Closet, and that alone, can afford them. There they may expatiate as much as they please upon their Wants and Unworthiness; There they may pour-out all their Complaints to God, and lay-open all their Grievs and Fears, and send-up all their Thanks and Acknowledgements: There Importunities are not forbidden, nor Repetitions unbecoming; but they may persist "knocking till it be opened to them, and asking till they obtain;" thus "taking Heaven (as it were) by Violence."

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Serm. XV.

From the Doctrine before us is evident the Absurdity of worshipping Idols. — Gods that are acknowledged not to be Every Where, are not worthy of respect Any Where.

In Reality, "by Nature they are no Gods," as St Paul justly teaches concerning them. — They are "lying Vanities:" so the Scriptures often call them. Their Divinity, mere Fiction of the human Imagination. But, by the Confession of their Worshipers they have only a limited Presence, Power & Understanding: Gods only of particular Countries, or perhaps only of particular Places in them, "Gods of the Hills, and not of the Vallies." And, how they came by their several Situations, and had their distinct Provinces assigned, their Voraries cannot pretend to tell; which, (we should reasonably think,) should be an insuperable Difficulty attending the very Foundations of their Superstition. Now,

If the Titles of the topical Deities cannot be made out, the Honours paid to them may be misplaced. But,

It is needless to insist on particular Arguments against a Devotion, which, in the Whole of it, is so apparently irrational. That supreme eternal Being, who has manifested, and does still manifest his Power and Intelligence, and thereby his essential Presence
every-

every-where, is alone worthy to receive the Praises, the religious Homage & Adoration, of all intelligent Creatures in Heaven and Earth, and "is ever high to all that call upon him in Truth."

But further, Is this the Property of God to be present every-where? Then,

Secondly, we may hence be assured, that he is also Omniscient, and "knoweth all things." He beholds not only our most private Retirements, but also that which is still more secret than these, even the very Thoughts and Intents of our Hearts, that inward Frame and Disposition of Mind, which may be dissembled, and entirely concealed from Men.

Hence is it, that he is stiled in Scripture "the Searcher of the Hearts & Reins," nor are there any passages in Holy Writ which do more worthily and magnificently represent him, than those which thus describe him, sitting in the Circuit of Heaven, and beholding at one View all the Actions, and all the Thoughts of all men throughout the whole World. "The Eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the Evil and the Good:" "Hell and Destruction are before him, how much more then, the Hearts of the Children of men?" "The Ways of men are before the Eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all their Goings."

Serm. XV.

(A) If

If God be every where, then he knows all things, even "the hidden things of Darknes & Dishonesty," and "the Secrets of our Hearts." (A)

Nothing can be hid from an infinite Eye; He is present to our Thoughts, & intimate to the deepest Recesses of our Hearts, for "in him we live, & move, & have our Being." "There is not a Thought, then, in our Heart but he knoweth it altogether," as being so intimately present with us.

Hence God argueth thus: "Can any hide himself in secret that I cannot see him? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth?" — Of this the Psalmist here takes Notice, when he makes this Inference from God's Presence with him: "Thou knowest my Thoughts long before." Now,

If there be no Darknes nor Shadow of Death, where the Workers of Iniquity may hide themselves, if their "secret Sins are set in the Light of God's Countenance;" how confounding must this Consideration be to Sinners, whose Consciences witness against them, that they have wilfully & habitually indulged themselves in Wickedness? And, if they are thoroughly convinced that their Transgressions have been committed in the Sight of that God, "who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity" with
 Approbation

(A) *Acutus Dei Oculus est ad omnia videndum.*

Approbation; what stronger Motive can there be to their betaking themselves to his Mercy by a speedy Repentance? Again,

Hence we may be assured of his Providence, that he observes, regards, and orders the Actions of all men. For,

Can we think that he, who is thus present with our Hearts, can be regardless of the Motions of them? That he who is still present to behold our Actions, should take no notice of them? that he who is all Ear to hear our words, should not observe the Falseness, the Blasphemy and Prophaneness of them? If we sh^d see God present with us, we should not doubt of it; wherefore then should we not regard it, when both Scripture and Reason, & Tradition, so inform us?

Hence also we may learn, that God is incomprehensible.

This is the Use which the Psalmist makes of this Assertion: "Thou, (saith he,) hast beset me behind and before; such Knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it."

That which is Infinite cannot be measured or comprehended by that which is finite.

Again, Hence also we may be convinced of God's

Omnipotence

Omnipotent, that "he can do all things."

Distance limits the Power of Creatures, & makes their Hands short; but God is every where, nothing therefore is out of his reach.

This also the Psalmist intimates at the tenth verse: "Even there also shall thy Hand lead me, & thy right hand shall hold me." Again,

This also may convince us of the Equity and Righteousness of the last Judgement.

As God is a God of infinite Presence, he hath therefore a perfect Knowledge of all our Actions and most private Intentions, and consequently will be able, at the last Day, to open all, and decide justly.

The Prophet Jeremiah puts this in a very strong Light, "The Heart of man, (says he,) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? - I, the Lord, search the Heart, and try the Reins:" And, With what Intent? To be a curious Spectator? By no means: But in order to "give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his Doings: - It is, that he may render a righteous Judgment at the last Day; where all Witnesses will be useless, for God will be both Witness and Judge. And yet,

A Witness there will be, not to inform the Judge,

(as

(as in earthly Courts,) but to attend and enforce the Justice of his Sentence upon every man; (viz.) our own Conscience, which will inwardly acquit or convict us, accusing, or else excusing us, in the Day when God shall judge the Secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

- Since God hath made the Heart the Seat of all Morality; it is absolutely necessary that he should have a perfect Knowledge of all that passes there, in order to be a competent Judge, and to give a final Sentence and Retribution of Happiness or Misery, according to Truth. But,

II. The Consideration of God's Omnipresence may be improved as a most powerful Restraint from Sin, and an Inducement to Obedience.

The Consideration of God's Omnipresence (seriously attended-to,) will have force sufficient to deter us from all Wickedness, be the Opportunity never so private and hidden from the Eyes of men; & excite us to the Practice of all Righteousness, even to the Denial of our most favourite Inclinations; (A) - It will teach us to behave ourselves at all times & in all places, with Circumspection and Care, as in the Presence

(A) *Infinita decussat mala intima recessus.*

Serm. XV.

Presence of our Judge who certainly observes us & in due time will "bring to light the hidden things of Darkness, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Heart, & will then render to every man according his Works;" - It will teach us to be as much afraid of committing any Sin or Impurity in Secret, as in the Face of the Sun, and in the Presence of all Mankind; considering that our most private Misdeeds are set before him, and our "secret Sins in the Light of his Countenance;" and that all the Wickedness which men now commit in private, will one day be published before all the Inhabitants of Heaven and Earth: - It will oblige us to govern our very Thoughts and Desires, and to endeavour to keep them in continual Subjection to the Law of God, seeing that he who "is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity" without punishing it, searches our very Hearts and Reins with his intimate Presence and all-seeing Eye; and consequently spieth out all our ways, and is acquainted with the inmost Recesses of our Hearts.

- It is a sublime Description which the Psalmist gives of the Presence, and Knowledge, and Power of God: - "Whether shall I go from thy Presence?" (i.e.) Had I the Command of Universal Nature, so that I could transport myself whither I pleased for a
safe

safe Retreat, there is no possibility of avoiding the Presence of God - "If I climb up into Heaven, Thou art there;" - If I mount to the Extremities of this material World, even to the Surface that parts it from the immense Void; Even there should I find myself within the Verge of God's sovereign Dominion: - "If I go down to Hell, thou art there also;" - If I descend to the Darkness, which is hid from all Living, there I should be naked before him; there is no Obscurity impenetrable to his all-searching Eye; - "If I take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me, & thy right hand hold me;" The Wings of the Morning are not swift enough to carry me from his pursuing Hand: "If I say, peradventure, the Darkness shall cover me, then shall my Night be turned to Day;" - The Shadows of Night are as open to his View as the brightest Sunshine; "Yea, the Darkness is no Darkness with God; but the Night is as clear as the Day; The Darkness & Light to him are both alike; for my Reins are thine, & thou hast covered me in my Mother's Womb."

Where the Deity is, there is the Power and Understanding, which made the Heaven and Earth, & formed the Spirit of man within him.

No Height, then, nor Depth, nor Distance, nor Darkness can seclude us from him.

This Consideration alone, (if but duly attended to,) must, in Reason, be sufficient to stop not only the external Acts of Sin; but also to the very first Motions and Tendencies towards it.

Sin is so shameful in itself, & so much below the Dignity of human Nature, that all, (except such as glorie in their Shame,) endeavour to keep their Sins as private as they can. (A) But,

To what End are we so careful to conceal our Vices, or even the least Indecencies we are guilty of, from the Eyes of men, when the Eye of God is always upon us, - when we can go no where from his Presence, and when all things are naked and open to him?

If the Presence of a Man, (like ourselves,) or even of a Child, be sometimes sufficient to restrain us from a sinful or indecent Action, how much more careful ought we to be of our Behaviour before that Holy and Divine Majesty, who fills Heaven and Earth, whose Notice nothing can escape? "Who is about our Path, and about our Bed, and spieth-out all

(A) *Nā fac in ignoto, quod notum fieri non vis.*

Never do that by Yourself, which you would blush to have another know.

all our ways" - "Unto whom all Hearts be open, all our Desires known, and from whom no Secrets are hid?"

Did men but live under this Apprehension, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile & wicked, or to neglect any thing that is good; — If this One Doctrine of Religion operated with an abiding Efficacy upon our Hearts and Consciences, it would be instead of a thousand Laws, to regulate our Conduct, instead of a thousand Motives to quicken us in Holiness. Under the Influence of such a Conviction, we sh'd reverence ourselves, & study to maintain a Purity of Intention, & Dignity of Action, & to walk worthy of that transcendently perfect Being, who intimately inspects our minutest Actions. But,

The Consideration of this should especially restrain us from the Commission of those Sins in which men do more securely and unrestrainedly indulge themselves by reason of their Privacy.

The perpetual Presence of so powerful and venerable a Witness, is one of the most awful Considerations which can be addressed to the dissolute. It removes all the Security which Secrecy can be supposed to give to Crimes. It aggravates the Guilt of them, by being committed in the Face of the Almighty, — and hath power to strike Terror into the

Heart of the greatest Criminal, in the midst of his Misdeeds.

This is the Use which the Psalmist here makes of it: If we believe that "God searches & knows us, that he knows our down-sitting & our up-rising, and understands our Thoughts afar off; - that there is not a Word in our Tongue but he knoweth it altogether;" If we believed this, in what Awe sh'd we live of the Divine Majesty, which is always present with us, and is as inseparable from us as we from ourselves!

Did men but thoroughly believe this, they would be so far from "devising Mischief in their Hearts," that they would, (as the Expression of the Wise-Man is,) be in the Fear of the Lord all the day long." (A)

The main Hope of Sinners is to remain conceal'd; if we are but privy to their Designs, they are utterly disappointed. Now, The Hope of Secresy vanishes, at the Apprehension of a Being who seeth in Secret.

What

(A) It is not merely the outward Decorum in our Conduct that the Presence of the invisible God teaches us; not only a watchful Care of our Behaviour in the Solemnities of Devotion. The Influence of this great Article of Religion extends to our most hidden Retirements, and requires very strict Attention to the Springs and Motions of deliberate Action in all the Affairs of human Life, as being all equally naked and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do, as our Ruler and Judge.

What Hope of Secrecy can he entertain, who knows that he is no more alone in his Solitude than in the midst of Society, nor less visible in Darkness than at Noon-day? Nay, who knows that his very Heart is laid open to its inmost Recess, with all the imperfect Materials of his thoughts, before they were connected or wrought into a Design? But,

Our Idea of the Deity stops not here; we consider him, not barely as a Spectator of our Actions, but as a Judge of them too: And, he must be an insolent Offender indeed, who will dare to commit a Crime in the Sight of him, who he knows will judge him, & who he is sure will condemn him for it.

It is, therefore, fit that the Mind of man should have an awful Sense of some Being, whose Authority may render even Privacy itself solemn & sacred.

The Character of wicked men is, that "they have not God before their Eyes." One great Cause of all the Wickedness and Violence upon the Earth is, they do not believe that God is near them.

We ought, therefore, frequently to call to mind these very plain and obvious Truths, (however awful and awakening,) contained in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, "Am I a God at Hand, (saith the Lord,) and not a God afar off? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth?"

Serm. XV. No

No one, therefore, can hide himself in secret Places, that he cannot see him. God is every where present in Knowledge, to ascertain the Thoughts of our Hearts, as well as the Deeds of our Lives; and in Power to punish and reward accordingly.

Should not, then, the Consideration of these things lay a more powerful Restraint from Sin upon us than it generally does? especially if we consider,

That to sin thus before him, and in his Presence, must be a great Aggravation of our Guilt, & is what will render our Iniquity sinful indeed.

The Royal Psalmist dissolved himself into tears, his heart was pierced, and even broken upon the Apprehension of his sin; his "sorrow was continually before him, and he went mourning all the day long;" for, (saith he,) "against thee only have I sinned, and done this Evil in thy Sight." This was the "Arrow that stuck fast within him, and made him roar through the very Disquiet of his Heart."

And well indeed he might, since God resents this as a most heinous Provocation, and worthy of his most tremendous Judgments.

"I will recompense them into their bosom, (saith the Lord) for 'tis a people that provoke me to my very Face." Again,

"I will number you to the sword, and you shall bow

how down to the slaughter; because, when I spake, you did not hear: but did evil before mine Eyes.

What other can the man expect, who treats God with Contempt in his Presence, and tramples on his Laws before his Face, but to be "recompensed to his Face?"

How great must the Provocation be, which shows that we are wholly void of Shame, of Fear, and Reverence of his sacred Majesty, and his all-seeing Eye? For, we hereby apparently demonstrate that we do very little reverence his sacred Presence, or dread his Power and Justice, and that we even degrade his Majesty below that of our Fellow-Creatures, when we do that in his Presence, which we abstain from doing in the Presence of a mortal man.

It would be better, then, for a Sinner not to believe the Divine Presence, than after having believ'd it, to sin in a total Disregard of it; rather indeed, in Defiance of it. But,

Secondly, As the Consideration of God's Presence should deter us from Sin, so should it animate and excite us in our Duty.

This was the great Expedient holy David took to secure himself in a regular & uniform Course of Virtue, (viz) "to set God always before him;" - "to

watch early and late ;" - "to remember him on his bed, and to think on him when he was waking." He was "the man after God's own Heart," & this was the chief Method by which he became so. It was this that enabled him to fulfil the public Character of a religious, just, and merciful Prince, and a Father of his people ; and that awed him in his Retirements, when the eyes of Men were far from him. It was this that gave Life to his Devotions, that carried him thro various Difficulties & Temptations and supported him under all his Troubles & Afflictions. Indeed,

It is a great Encouragement for us to acquit ourselves handsomely, to have the Eyes of men upon us especially of those whose Applause and Approbation we value : This has always been found to exalt the Powers of men, and to refine and improve their Behaviour. But, How much stronger must the Influence of it be, when we look up to the Approbation of Angels, and to the Applause of God !

Men are but faint Images of Greatness : That glorious Being, who is the Original Fountain of all Power and Wisdom is infinitely more to be feared, & it must be of infinitely greater Importance to approve ourselves to him ; requiring at the same time, much greater Vigilance and Application of Mind, because

because his Presence reaches to our inmost Essence, and knows our secret Thoughts. The Eye of God is more piercing than that of Man, and his Praise above all Commendation.

This, therefore, should engage us to perform our Duty with the greatest Zeal and Fervency, as knowing that God sees with what Intentions we engage in it.

The Consideration of the great Judge of Heaven and Earth's being present with us, and beholding with what Ardour we "strive for the Mastery in all things," should have the greatest Influence upon us to "give all Dilligence to make our Calling & Election sure," - "so to run that we may obtain the Prize;" - and "not to faint, nor be weary in Well-doing."

The Scripture very instructively describes the whole of Religion by that comprehensive Expression of "Walking with God;" which signifies a constant serious Sense of the Divine Presence upon our minds, producing a circumspect Care to please him in all things. Indeed,

The Heathens saw the Excellency of this so well to promote Virtue, that they advised men to set before them some eminent virtuous person, and so to live, as tho' he always beheld their Actions, and was

ever present with them : Wisely supposing, that the Eye and Observance of a Superior in Goodness would excite us to the utmost Perfection : For, to the Esteem & Approbation of our Fellow-Creatures, none of us are insensible.

There are few, who, in the conspicuous parts of their Life, when they know the Eyes of the Publick to be fixed upon them, but act their part with Propriety and Decorum. But!

What is the Observation of the Publick ! What is the Presence of the greatest or wisest Man on Earth to that Presence of Divinity which constantly surrounds us !

The man who realiseth in his mind this august Presence, feels a constant Incentive for acquitting himself with Dignity.

Men judge often falsely, often imperfectly, of what passes before them . They are imposed on by specious Appearances ; & the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly , we may want the Opportunity of doing Justice to our Character , by any proper Display of it in the Sight of the World. Our Situation may bury in Obscurity those Talents and Virtues which were intitl'd to command the highest Esteem. But He , in whose Presence the good Man acts, is both

both an impartial, & an unerring Judge of Worth. No fallacious Appearances impose on him. No secret Virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the Meanest as to the Greatest; and his Approbation confers eternal Rewards.

The man, therefore, who (with holy David,) "sets the Lord always before him," is prompted to excell in Virtue by Motives which are peculiar to himself; and which engage, on the side of Duty, both Honour and Interest.

Surely therefore, the Consideration of a righteous Judge, still present with us, and taking notice of all we do, must be the strongest Motive to perform all our services in the best Manner we are able. (A)

That therefore we, who know that we stand before the living God, do all things in his Sight, speak all things in his Hearing, & think all things in his Presence.

That we are not more fervent in our Prayers, more serious & composed in our Words, more pure and heavenly in our Thoughts, must be ascribed to the Want of this Consideration, that God stands by us, and hath a View of all our proceedings, and that in him we live & move, and have our Being.

Among

(A) *Dei Faciem reuereri oportet.*

Serm. XV.

Among Men, indeed, an Eye-Servant is the Character of a bad Servant; but if men would once become Eye-Servants to God, the Work of Religion would be done at once; for, they would then be truly good, at all Times, and in all Places.

In all our Actions, therefore, let us think that God sees us — And in all our Actions labour to see God. The former will make us fear him, and the latter move us to love him. The Fear of God is the Beginning of Knowledge, — and the Knowledge of God, is the Perfection of Love. But,

Thirdly, As the Omnipresence of God implies his Omniscience, it is of further Benefit to the Righteous.

Supposing their virtuous Endeavours to be faithful, yet many Imperfections will attend them. A faultless Tenor of unblemished Life, is beyond the Reach of man. Hence, in many Cases, he will be disquieted by a Sense of Guilt and Folly. In this State, to which we are often reduced by the Weakness of human Nature, the Belief of God's continual Presence brings Relief to the Heart. — It acted before, as an animating Principle; It now acts as a Principle of Comfort.

In the midst of many Imperfections, a virtuous Man appeals to his Divine Witness, for the Sincerity

city of his Intentions — That in the general Train of his Conduct, it is his Study to keep the Law of God.

Mere Law, among Men, is rigid and inflexible. — As no human Lawgiver can look into the Hearts, he cannot therefore, (even tho he were ever present with them,) estimate their Character exactly; and must consequently treat all alike, according to their Outward Actions. But,

Every minute Diversity of Character, Temper and Situation is known to God. It is not only from what his Servants do, but from what they seek to do, that he forms his Judgement of them. He attends to all those Circumstances which render the Trial of their Virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the Whisper of Devotion as it rises in the Soul; and beholds the Tear of Contrition which falls in Secret. He sees the good Intention struggling in it's Birth; and pursues it, in it's Progress, through those various Obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into Action.

Good Men, therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some Consolation from his Knowledge of their Hearts. Tho they may sometimes have erred from the right Path, they can look up to him who is ever with them, and say, as an A-

Serm. XV.

postle

posse, who had grievously offended; once said to his great and divine Master; "Lord; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." (A)

Appealing thus to their Omniscient Witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the Hope of his Clemency. But,

At the same time it is the peculiar Advantage of this Sentiment of the Divine Presence, that it prevents such Hope from flattering them too much, or rising into undue Presumption. For, while it encourages him, by the Reflection on all his good Dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him, by the Remembrance that his "secret sins also are ever in the Light of the Divine Countenance."

So that, by dwelling under the Sense of God's being continually with us, we keep alive the proper Temper of a Christian in the Soul. Humility, without Dejection; Fear, mingled with Hope. We are cheer'd, without being list'd up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing Eye of Justice, but are comforted with the Thoughts of that Mercy, which

(A) *Me trahit invitum nova Fis: aliudque Cupido,*

Mens aliud faceret. Video meliora, proboque,

Deteriora sequor.

See Rom. 7, 15, &c to the End. Man, that is compounded of Body and Soul, has naturally a civil War within him.

Inferences.

41

which, thro Christ, the Discerner of all Hearts holds forth to the sincere and penitent.

Such are the blessed Effects which this Principle of Religion produces upon the inward moral State of a good man. Let us, therefore, consider further his external Circumstances, and examine the Influence which this Principle has upon his Happiness, in several different Situations in Life.

Let us first view him, in what the World calls Prosperity, when his Circumstances are easy & affluent, and his Life flows in a smooth and untroubled Course. Here it might be thought, that a Sense of Divine Presence could operate upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting Temperance, and restraining the Disorders incident to a prosperous State. Valuable Effects, indeed! and most conducive to the true Enjoyment of all that is agreeable in Life. But, tho it doubtless does exert this salutary Influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the Virtue of a good man amidst the Temptations of Pleasure, but it gives to his Prosperity a Security, and a peculiar Relish, which to others is unknown. He is delivered from every disquieting Alarm. He dwells as with a Friend and Protector, from whom he conceives his Blessings to proceed. He can ap-
peal

Serm. XV.

peal to him for the Thankfulness with which he receives them, and for his Endeavours to employ them well. He trusts, that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the Goodness which he has already experienced will continue to bless him; &c, tho he believes himself not exempted from the Changes of the World; yet, in the midst of these, he has Ground to hope that Sources of Comfort and Happiness shall always be left open to him. Add to this,

That the Pleasures of Life, while they last, are unspeakably heightned, by the Presence of that Benefactor who bestows them.

The pleasing Emotion of Gratitude to the Giver, mingles with the Enjoyment of the Gift. All Nature is beautified, to him who beholds God in all things, Hence arise a Variety of pleasing Sensations: In the smiling Scenes of Nature, he contemplates the Benignity of it's Author. In it's sublime Objects, he admires his Majesty. In his awful and terrible Ones, he adores his Power. He dwells in this World as in a magnificent Temple; which is full of the Glory of it's Founder; and every where views Nature offering up it's Incense to him, upon a thousand Altars.

Such Ideas exalt and enoble the human Mind, & reflect an additional Lustre on the Brightness of Prosperity.

From

From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted Condition of good men. For, as Prosperity may, so Affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his Lot. It enters into the appointed Trial of his Virtue; and, in one Degree or other, is the Doom of all.

Here we shall find various Situations occur, in which no Relief is equal to what a virtuous & holy man derives from a Sense of the perpetual Presence of God with him.

Is he, for Instance, cast into an obscure Condition in the World, without Friends to assist him, or any to regard or consider his State? He enjoys the Satisfaction of thinking, that tho he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten by God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows, that he will not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite Variety of Being, or lost in the Immensity of his Works. The poor can, with as much Encouragement, as the Rich and Great, lift up his Eyes to Heaven, and say, "nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee; thy Rod and thy Staff comfort me, thou holdest me by my right hand." The gracious Presence of that Supreme Being, is affected by no Diversity of Rank or Fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the Virtuous and Upright; like it's

14 Of the Omnipresence of God.

glorious Image, the Sun in the Firmament, which sheds it's Rays equally upon the humble Cottage, as upon the Palaces of Kings; & accompanies our Steps to the most distant Regions of the Earth.

If, therefore, the good man should be driven into Exile from all his Friends, and obliged to "dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea," even there would God's hand hold him, and his right hand guide him. But,

Tho raised above Obscurity or Poverty, yet, in any Situation of Fortune, Outumny and Reproach may be the Lot of the Servant of God. His good Intentions may be misconstrued; his Character unjustly traduced; & to the open Reviling of Enemies, the more bitter Unkindness of Friends may sometimes be joined. In this Situation, when wounded in Spirit, & perhaps, unable to make his Innocence appear, to whom shall he have Recourse for Defence, to whom make his best Appeal; but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knows his Heart? How frequently, amidst the Injustice & Oppression of the World, has distressed Innocence had no other Relief but this — "God is my Witness." — "God is my Avenger." — "Behold my Witness is in Heaven, and my Record is on high." — "He hath seen it, and he will repay."

A good Conscience, when connected with the Divine Presence & Approbation, becomes a steady principle of Fortitude in the Mind under all Discouragements. Hence a virtuous man possesses a high Degree of Independence, both on the Praise, and on the Censure of the World; and, in the Consciousness of his Integrity, looks down with Indifference, as from a superior Station, upon all the harsh Censures of a giddy and ignorant World. "With me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of Man's Judgment; He that judgeth me is the Lord."

The Sense of being continually with God, diffuses a holy Calm, which unjust Reproach cannot disturb. In the Presence of that august and venerable Witness, all the Noise and Clamours of Men, like the Murmurs of a distant Storm, die away. But,

Lastly, Supposing the Character of a good man to be untainted by Reproach; supposing also his external Situation to be opulent and distinguished, many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the Distresses to which he may be exposed.

Secret Griefs may be preying upon him; and his Heart left to feed in Silence on its own Bitterness. He may labour under sore Disease, and discern his earthly Frame gradually mouldering into Dust. He

may be deprived of his Friends and Relatives, who had been the chief Comforts of his State; or he may be obliged to prepare himself for taking a Farewell of them forever.

In the midst of these various & afflicting Scenes of human Life, no Consolation can be more powerful than what ariseth from the Presence of a Divine Protector and Guardian, to whom our Case, with all its Sorrows, is perfectly known. To the secret Anguish of the Soul, he is no inattentive Witness. Every Groan which is heaved from the labouring Bosom, tho' heard by no human Ear, reaches his Throne. — And, "As he knows our Frame, so he remembers that we are but Dust;" & in the midst of those Distresses which the present Circumstances of Man render unavoidable, "I will send help from his Sanctuary." In a word,

The Presence of God, is a Presence of Power, against which no Force can prevail, and of Wisdom, which no Device can over-reach. — The most formidable Appearances are frequently controuled, & the most threatening Tendencies over-ruled by divine Providence to happy Issues for the defenceless who trust in God, and "cast their Burden upon him." — It was this that bore up David under all his Troubles, "I have set the Lord always before me,

for, for he is on my right hand, so that I shall not greatly fall."

"God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in time of Trouble; therefore will we not fear tho the Earth be removed, and tho the Mountains shake at the Tempest of the storm."

Surrounded with this compassionate Presence of the Almighty, good Men never view themselves as left in this Vale of Tears, to bear, solitary & alone, the whole Weight of human Woe. In their dark, as in their brighter Hours, God is with them. Even in that Vally of the Shadow of Death, where no Friend nor Comforter can aid them, He is with them still. It is true,

The Care of Providence is to us invisible, (A) &c.

(A) These Considerations may, probably, be regarded by some, as Ideal and Visionary; requiring Aid from a heated, or enthusiastical Fancy, in order to give them force.

It is readily admitted, that amidst the Hurry and Turbulence of the World, it may be difficult to bring these religious Sentiments so fully to View, as is necessary, for their making a just Impression on the Soul. — This requires the Effort of an intelligent and feeling Mind; and therefore, cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unfeeling Crowd, nothing appears real, but what is exposed to the Sense: What is invisible, is to them, as tho it had no Existence. But, by the Grossness of their own Conceptions, they have no Title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all other Considerations taken from the Sense of the Divine Presence, as visionary and

Of the Omnipresence of God.

we cannot possibly penetrate into the Methods of its Interpositions, nor into its Designs: yet it must be a perpetual Source of Comfort to good Minds, that the Eyes of God run to and fro throughout the Earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose Heart is perfect with him. He does not indeed give them a thoro' Security against all Troubles: But it ought to give us perfect Contentment, & we should acquiesce in it with Pleasure, that God is ever near to us, that his Wisdom governs the World, & directs the whole Series of Events in it.

On In the greatest Commotions, therefore, in the most imminent and threatening Dangers, even in Death

enthusiastick, it hath, (I hope,) been clearly shown, on the contrary, that they are founded on the most certain & unquestionable Principles of Reason. They essentially belong not to Revealed Religion only, but to Natural Religion also. Their Reality can be denied by none, but by those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the World. For, if he exist, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the World which he governs. He must know what is going on in his own Universe, and especially must know what passes within the Heart which he has made, and of which he is the Judge.

To be every where present, is the Attribute of his Nature, which, of all others, is most necessary to his Administration of the Universe. This, accordingly, is an Attribute which all Religions have ascribed to him. All Nations have believed in it. All Societies appeal to it, in the Solemnities of an Oath, by which they determine Controversies.

This Attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, all the Consequences here deduced from it, plainly and naturally follow.

Death itself, this sh'd allay our Fears, that "God is always at hand to help and protect us." This was the support of Moses' Faith in his Sufferings, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." (x)

To conclude, whenever we are under any Trouble or Pressure, we should rebuke our Fears, and challenge our anxious Thoughts with David, "Why art thou cast down O my soul? and why art thou disquie-
red within me? Trust still in God." For,

We are assured, that "whoever dwells under the Defence of the Most-High, and abides under the Shadow of the Almighty, shall not be afraid of any Terror by Night, nor for the Arrow that flieth by Day; nor for the Pestilence that walketh in Dark-
ness, nor for the Destruction that destroyeth at Noon Day."

Whoever believeth that God is with him, & that Omnipotent Goodness stands by him, to support, relieve, and protect him, when, and as it seems best to his Wisdom, has all, & "every thing requisite to
Life

(A) The Pleasure which affects the human Mind with the most lively and transporting Touches, is, the Sense that we act in the Eye of Infinite Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness, that will crown our vir-
tuos Endeavours here, with Happiness hereafter, large as our Desires, & lasting as our immortal Souls. Without this, the highest State of Life is insipid, and with it the lowest is a Paradise.

Serm. XV.

Life and Godliness:" For, it is his "sure Trust, in which he may always resort." In a Word,

God is present to us all, as Creator, as Ruler, and Preserver; as he made, influences, and governs all things by his Authority & Power, by his Knowledge and Providence. But,

There is another kind of Divine Presence, mentioned in the Scripture, of which our Saviour thus speaks: "If a man love me, him will my Father love, & We will come, & make our Abode with him." And! Blessed is he who can secure to himself this inestimable Treasure; for, whatever his Condition be, "his Heart will rejoice, & his Joy no man taketh from him. (A)

(A) See No. 56, of the Spectator, as before. And No. 571.

10

SERMON XVI.

Of the Eternity of God.

Psalm xc. 2. "From Everlasting to Everlasting,
Thou art God."

As from the Spirituality of the Divine Nature
we have inferred the Omnipotence of God, as being
wholly a pure Mind, & thereby capable of infinite
Inspection; so do we also (A) his Eternity, as not
consisting of Matter, and so incapable of Dissolution.

Moses, (the Author of this Psalm,) begins it
with an Acknowledgement of God's Providence to
his people from the Beginning of the World;

"Thou, Lord, hast been our dwelling-place, from
all generations." He was well acquainted with the
History of the World, and the Providence of God,
from the beginning of the Creation. And,

As if he had spoken too little of God, in saying
that his Providence had been exercised in all Ages
of the World, he tells us here, that he was, before
the World was, and that he made it: he was, from

(A) One Attribute, like a due Proposition, is here endeavoured to be
proved upon another.

all Eternity, and should continue to all Ages the same. "Before the Mountains were brought forth," (the most firm & durable parts of the World,) or the Earth & the World were made," - before any thing was created, "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." All the Works of Nature, & even Nature itself had a Beginning, and the instant they have attain'd their limited Perfection, they approach towards a slow, but sure Decline; revolving Seasons soon sully their beauty, & the silent Power of Time gradually shakes their Foundations, & at last levels them with the Dust; whilst the Deity, (the God of Nature,) who made them all, himself unmade, remains uninjured, shining, unconscious of Decay, "From Everlasting to Everlasting, Thou art God."

In speaking to this Perfection of the Deity, I shall, First, Show the Import of the Phrase and Doctrine before us.

II. That this Perfection belongs to God. And,

Lastly, See what Uses can be made from it, for the Information of our Judgments, and the Reformation of our Lives. And,

First, I am to shew what we are to understand by the Phrase before us, and the Import of it. "From Everlasting to Everlasting, Thou art God."

As we believe a God, so also we believe him to be Eternal, according to the full & proper Import of the Word, as excluding both Beginning & End, having no Limitation of either. (A)

The words which we render Eternal, Everlasting, & the like, when applied to Persons, to Things, to Ordinances, or Constitutions, imply a Duration, which shall then only have an End, when these things cease to be; in which Sense we read of Eternal Hills, & Everlasting Mountains, (i.e) of Hills & Mountains which shall last as long as the Earth shall endure; and of the Passover, and other ritual Constitutions and Observances of the law of Moses, "that this shall be an Ordinance forever," (i.e) shall continue as long as the ritual law of Moses is in force, (viz) until the time of Reformation, and of the Introduction of a better Covenant. Thus God saith: "I have chosen this House, that my name may be there for ever." And again, "This shall be my rest for ever;" and yet he hath long since forsaken that Place, and suffered it to be destroyed for ever, and thereby rendered it impossible for the Jews to perform those Sacrifices & Oblations which were

(A) God, the Beginning of all things, the Idea and Pattern of all Good, is that Almighty Omnipotence which wanteth Beginning and Ending; which, being made of none, hath, by his own Power, created all things.

Serm. XVI.

were stiled "Ordinances forever." But,

When Eternity is applied to God, it imports a Duration which Ever was, and Ever will be, which never begun, nor will ever end.

The Eternity of God, (absolutely taken,) comprehends both these, & signifies an infinite Duration, in either respect. So that when we say "God is eternal," we mean that he always was, and will be forever; that he had no Beginning of Life, nor will ever have any End of Days, but that he is "from Everlasting to Everlasting;" "The same Yesterday, To-Day, and Forever."

As to the Manner of this Eternal Existence; it is manifest, it herein infinitely transcends the Manner of the Existence of all Created Beings, even of such as shall exist forever; that whereas it is impossible for their finite Minds to comprehend all that is past, or to understand perfectly all things that are present, much less to know all that is future; or to have entirely in their Power any thing that is to come; but their Thoughts, and Knowledge, and Power, must of Necessity have Degrees and Periods, and be successive and transient as the Things themselves: The Eternal, Supreme Cause, on the contrary, (supposing him to be an Intelligent Being,) must of Necessity have such a perfect, independent and unchangeable Comprehension of all Things, that there can be no one Point or Instant of his Eternal Duration, wherein all Things that are past, present, or to come, will not be as entirely known and represented to him in one single Thought or View; and all Things present and future, be equally in his Power and Direction; as if there was really no Succession at all, but all things were, at once, actually present before him. Thus

count of his infinite Duration, for that had been impossible

Curiosity is one of the strongest and most lasting of our Passions. However, That God exerted his *Creative Powers*, (if the Expression be allowed,) long before his Formation of this Planetary System, will admit of no Doubt with the Man who embraces the divine Revelation; since the Fall of man arose from a *fallen* and *created* Spirit: and the Voice of Reason, in this Respect, entirely harmonizes with the Attestations of sacred Writ. In all Probability, the Deity had created Myriads of Beings and thousands of Worlds, before he fixed our Sun in the Centre of our System, which form the present System, and other Orders of Beings, as we unknown, peopled them; in like Manner, perhaps, after this World shall be dissolved, other Worlds may be created, and a new Race of Beings be made. But, however this be, tho' there was a Time when this World did not exist, yet we have no Reason to think that God was always a *solitary Being*; for, something very observable strikes an attentive Reader, &c. (under)

there was somewhat peculiar in the Nature of God. "IN THE BEGINNING ELOHIM created. And presently after, we read of God's addressing himself to some of equal Power and Authority with him, and Capacity to create — "Let US make man — in OUR Image — after OUR Likeness" &c. (Gen 1, 26. — See iii, 22.) Now,

A Reader, who came perfectly a Stranger, and unprejudiced to the Sacred Books, would be struck with this Peculiarity: and when he was informed, by a thorough Knowledge of the *Revelation*, that God did really exist, tho' in an undivided Unity of Nature, yet in a Trinity of Persons; he would have no Doubt, that this *Name*, & these *Phrases*, referred to this important Discovery. And he would see, that this Notion, so far from being contrary to Reason, is more agreeable to it, than any Opinion of the absolute *Unity* of the Divine Nature. For, conceive we only Three Divine Persons mutually to partake of the Divine Essence or Nature, and to be united by the same perfect Will; and all our Apprehensions of the Loneliness of solitary Existence are dispersed.

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Thus far we can speak intelligibly concerning the Eternal Duration of the Self-Existent Being; & no Atheist can say this is an impossible, absurd, or insufficient Account. It is, in the most proper and intelligible Sense of the Words, (to all the Purposes of Excellency and Perfection,) The entire and perfect Possession of an Endless Life.

Others have imagined that the Difference between the Manner of the Eternal Existence of the Supreme Cause, and that of the Existence of Created Beings, is this, [viz] That, whereas the latter is a continual transient Succession of Duration; the former is one Point or Instant, comprehending Eternity, & wherein all Things are really co-existent.

But this Distinction we shall not here insist upon, as being of no Use in any Debate; because it is impossible to prove & explain it in such a Manner, as to convince any One, that there is any thing in it. (A)

It is true, indeed, - &c. - (under)

It is true, indeed, that as to God's Eternity, from the Beginning, the Scripture doth not give us any Account; It only tells us in general, that "God was before the World was, and that he created it." It doth not condescend to gratify our Curiosity, in giving us an Account of what God did before he made the World, or how he entertained himself from all Eternity: (A) - It doth not give us any distinct Ac-

COUNT

(A) To suppose the Eternity of God to be *Duratio tota simul*, in which we are not to conceive any Succession; but to imagine it an Instant, is an intelligent and intelligible Notion. We may as well conceive the Immensity of God to be a Point; as his Eternity to consist

Euclid's Philosophus item rogatus, "Quid agerem Dii, quique Ne possidentem gaudebant?" Cetera quiddam ignoro, (inquit,) at Curiosus illis Oculis certe scio.

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(A) Socrates interrogatus a quodam, "Quid ageretur apud Inferos?" Deridens hominis Curiositatem, respondit; "Nec Ego, (inquit,) unquam ibi, nec cum quoquam illuc reverso sum collocutus."

Euclides Philosophus item rogatus; "Quales essent Dii; quibusque Re possibilibus gaudebant?" Cetera quiddam ignorare, (inquit,) ac Curiosus illis Odiosus curis scio.

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Supposing he had not, something very observable strikes an attentive Reader, in the Mosaic Account of the Creation; which seems strongly to suggest, that the Deity is not a solitary Being, existing in such an absolute *Unity*, as to exclude all Degree of Personality or Communion. For, the very first Name by which *Moses* calls God, (*Elohim*), is of a plural Ending, and therefore naturally leads us to imagine, that there was somewhat peculiar in the Nature of God. "In the Beginning *ELOHIM* created. And presently after, we read of God's addressing himself to some of equal Power and Authority with him, and Capacity to create — "Let *US* make man — in *OUR* Image — after *OUR* Likeness" &c. (Gen 1, 26. — See iii, 22.) Now,

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impossible for our finite Understanding to comprehend : If we should ascend upwards Millions of Ages, yet, we should never arrive at the Height of it, nor have ascended up to the Beginning of Infinity. (A)

The Father, Son, and Holy-Spirit, consummately happy in each other, were and will be the Objects of each other's Complacency, from Eternity to Eternity.

Let this Argument be fairly and impartially considered, and we may venture to affirm, that the Notion of a *Triune* Nature in the Deity is far more consonant to Reason, & liable to less Objections, than that of absolute *Unity* and mere *solitary* Existence. — But of this Subject we shall speak more fully, when we come to treat professedly of the *Trinity*, and to shew the true Nature of that fundamental Doctrine.

(A) That Something has really existed from Eternity, is One of the certainest and most evident Truths in the World; acknowledged by all Men, and disputed by none. Yet, as to the *Manner* how it can be, there is nothing in Nature more difficult for the Mind of Man to conceive, than this very first Plain and Self-Evident Truth. For, *How can anything have existed eternally; (i.e.) How an Eternal Duration can be now actually past; is a thing utterly as impossible for our narrow*

Understands, implies that it was once present; for, the Idea of being once present, is actually included in the Idea of it's being Past. — This, therefore, is a Depth not to be sounded by human Understanding. We are sure that there has been an Eternity, and yet contradict ourselves when we measure this Eternity by any Notion which we can frame of it.

If we go to the Bottom of this Matter, we shall find that the Difficulties we meet-with in our Conceptions of Eternity proceed from this single Reason, that we can have no other Idea of any kind of Duration, than that by which we Ourselves, and all other created Beings, do exist;

Serm. XVI.

which

explained.

67

The Scripture, therefore, which was wrote to instruct

which is, a successive Duration made-up of past, present, and to come. There is nothing which exists after this Manner, all the parts of whose Existence were once actually present, and consequently may be reach'd by a certain Number of Years applied to it. We may ascend as high as we please, and employ our Being to that Eternity which is to come, by adding Millions of Years to Millions of Years, yet, we shall never come up to any Fountain-Head of Duration, to any Beginning of Eternity; but, at the same time, we are sure, that whatever was once present does lie within the Reach of Numbers, tho perhaps we can never be able to put enough of them together for that Purpose. We may as well say, that any thing may be actually present in any part of infinite Space, which does not lie at a certain Distance from us, as that any part of infinite Duration was once actually present, and does not also lie at some determined Distance from us. The Distance in both Cases may be immeasurable and indefinite as to our Faculties, but our Reason tells us that it cannot be so in itself.

Here, therefore, is that Difficulty which human Understanding is not capable of surmounting. We are sure that something must have existed from Eternity, and are at the same time unable to conceive that any thing which exists, (according to our Notion of Existence,) can have existed from Eternity.

It is hard for any one, who has not revolved this Thought in his own Mind, to follow in such an abstracted Speculation; but, it is the rather to be preferred, because it is a demonstrative Argument of the Being and Eternity of God: and tho there are many other Demonstrations which lead us to this great Truth, yet we ought not to lay aside any Proofs in this Matter, which the Light of Reason has suggested to us, especially when it is such a one as has been urged by Men famous for their Penetration and Force of Understanding, and which appears altogether conclusive to those who will be at the Pains to examine it.

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Serm. XVI.

Light

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the same time can frame no Idea of it, but what is big with Absurdity and Contradiction. We can have no other Conception of any Duration which is past, than that all of it was once present; and whatever was once present, is at some certain Distance from us, and whatever is at any certain Distance from us, (be the Distance ever so remote,) cannot be Eternity. The very Notion of any Duration's being past, implies that it was once present; for, the Idea of being once present, is actually included in the Idea of it's being Past. — This, therefore, is a Depth not to be sounded by human Understanding. We are sure that there has been an Eternity, and yet contradict ourselves when we measure this Eternity by any Notion which we can frame of it.

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Sera. XVI.

Light

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Light of Reason, may be looked upon as Axioms in this Point.

First, It is certain that no Being could have made itself; for if so, it must have acted before it was, which is a Contradiction.

Secondly, That therefore some Being must have existed from all Eternity.

Thirdly, That whatever exists after the Manner of created Beings, (or, according to any Notions which we have of Existence,) could not have existed from Eternity. And,

Fourthly, That this eternal Being must therefore be the great Author of Nature, "*The Ancient of Days*," who, being at an infinite Distance in his Perfections from all finite and created Beings, exists in a quite different manner from them, and in a manner of which they can have no Idea.

We have clear Notions of Intelligence and Activity, which, being conscious of in ourselves, we can easily ascribe to others, in a greater or lesser Degree. But,

A *present* Existence which was from *everlasting* — This, at the first Proposal, overwhelms our feeble Understandings, and our Ideas of it are inadequate.

It becomes us, therefore, in the Consideration of this Subject, to have a thorough Sense of our own Weakness, with a Resolution to rest satisfied, if we have convincing Proof that God is, in the highest Sense, Eternal, tho there may be Objections raised against it, which really amount to no more than that the Object is too great for our Faculties, & that we cannot by searching find it out, nor understand it to Perfection.

When once any Proposition is clearly demonstrated to be true; it ought not to disturb us, that there be perhaps perplexing Difficulties on the other Side, which merely for Want of adequate Ideas of the Manner of Existence of the things demonstrated, are not easy to be cleared. Indeed, were it possible there should be any Proposition which could equally be demonstrated on both Sides of the Question, or which could on both Sides be *absolutely* demonstrated; (in some sense very inconsiderately asserted,) This, it must be confessed, would shut the Case. Upon this absurd Supposition, all Difference of True and False, all Thinking and Reasoning, and the Use of all our Faculties would be entirely at an End: But when to Demonstration we have

our Curiosity, tells us, that "God was from Everlasting, before the World was, and that he laid the Foundation of it": and not only this; but that he will so continue to perpetual & endless Generations, "without either Beginning of Time, or End of Days." - "From Everlasting to Everlasting, Thou art God."

This is a Character of the Deity that carries in it what must appear to our Minds, grand, & attractive of a special Veneration, as including in it Self-Existence, Necessary-Existence, & Independence. (A)

But, II.

For the same Reason it was, that the Multitude marvelled at our Saviour's Doctrine, "Because he taught as One having Authority," who delivered all things in plain Propositions, to be believed by all men; "and not as the Scribes," who were obliged to make good all they produced by wise Sophistry and Reason.

(A) These are Characters of the Supreme Being, of which we have very imperfect and inadequate Ideas, because there is nothing that we are conscious of, either in ourselves, or in other Beings, which bears the least Resemblance to any of these Perfections of the Deity, or can give us any Notion of them; tho at the same Time, most certain Truths and undeniable Characters of the Deity: For, whatever exists, must either have come into Being out of Nothing, absolutely without Cause; Or it must have been produced by some eternal Cause; Or it must be Self-Existent. Now, To arise out of Nothing; absolutely without any Cause; has been already shown to be a plain Contradiction. To have been produced by some Eternal Cause, cannot possibly

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Light of Reason, may be looked upon as Axioms in this Point.

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We have clear Notions of Intelligence and Activity, which, being conscious of in ourselves, we can easily ascribe to others. In a greater Side, there are opposed on the other, only Difficulties raised from our Want of having adequate Ideas of the Things themselves; This ought not to be esteemed an Objection of any real Weight.

It is directly & clearly *Demonstrable*, (and acknowledged to be so, even by all the Atheists that ever lived,) that *Something has been from Eternity*: All the Objections, therefore, raised against the Eternity of any thing, grounded merely on our Want of having an adequate Idea of Eternity, ought to be looked upon as of no real Solidity.

(A) It is said that when Aristotle saw the Books of Moses, he commended them for their *majestick* Style, as well becoming a *GOD*: but withall, said, "That Way of Writing was not fit for a *Philosopher*, because there was nothing *proved*, but Matters were delivered as if they would rather *command* than *persuade* Belief." For

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sibly be true of every thing; but something must have existed Eternally and Independantly; as has likewise been shown. It remains therefore, that That Being which has existed Independantly from Eternity, must of Necessity be Self-Existent. Which Self-Existence of God, is not to be understood in the positive Sense, that - &c. - (under)

Sense, that he produced himself, for that is evidently an Absurdity, in making him then both Cause and Effect: but it signifies that as he did not rise from Nothing, so he was not produced by Another. And, by adding the Character of Necessarily-Existent, (inferring from it an apparent Impossibility of his not being,) This, perhaps, is not sufficiently obvious to every Capacity. It may not be amiss, therefore, to consider

Serm. XVI.

them

But, II, I am to show that this Perfection belongs

them a little distinctly, with a View to the Pretensions which other Beings, besides the Deity, may have to them: and, if it shall appear that there is no Ground for such Pretensions, we shall be the more convinced that we rightly appropriate them to him, as the peculiar Attributes of his eternal Existence.

There are those, who, from the regular & connected Appearances in Nature, have asserted that things could not possibly be otherwise than they are, even as to the Manner and Order of their Subsistence. But,

Considering what we are conscious of in Ourselves, that some Alterations in the Form and Order of Material Objects, depend on our own Power and Will, it is surprising any one should think that none of them could be otherwise than as they now actually are; much more, when we consider the Variety of Objects, & Events which daily occur, that none of them could have happened in any other Manner than they do: not because they are directed by unerring Wisdom, but from an Impossibility in the Nature of things, or Want of Power to have determined them otherwise; for, that is the real Meaning of things being produced by a Necessity of Nature.

If we know any thing at all, we are assured that there is a great Variety of Beings in the Universe, each having a singular and separate Existence, independent on the rest: For, What Connection is there between Things on the Earth, and Things in the Sea? Or between Us & a fix'd Star in the far distant Heavens? Now, Can all these things, (the Whole System, and every one of it's parts,) exist *Necessarily*, so that not one Individual of any Kind, nor even the most minute Particle in their Composition, could possibly be wanting, or otherwise than it is: For, whether we consider the *Form* of the World, with the *Disposition and Motion* of its Parts; or whether we consider the *Matter* of it, as such, without Respect to its present Form; Every Thing in it, both the *Whole* and every one of its *Parts*; their *Situation and Motion*, the *Form* also and *Matter*, are the most Arbitrary & Dependent things, and the farthest removed from Necessity: For, Who can assert that there could not be *more or fewer* Stars, *more or fewer* Planets, or that their *Size, Figure or Motion*, could not be different from what it now is; Or, that there could not be *more or fewer* Plants and Animals upon the Earth; or the present Ones of different *Shape and Size* from what they now are? In all these Things there is the greatest Arbitrariness, in Respect of Power and Possibility, that can be imagined.

A Necessity, indeed, of *Fitness*, (i.e.) a Necessity that Things should be as they are, in Order to the *Well-Being* of the Whole, (which is not a Necessity of Nature, but only *moral*;) there may be in all these things; (i.e.) an apparent Relation of *particular Things*, and the Parts of the

proved from Reason.

71

longs to God; and, the Method I shall take for the more full Illustration of this Point, shall be,

First, To confirm it by the Dictates of Natural Light; and then,

Secondly, by Scripture, or Divine Revelation; &c.

First, from the Dictates of Natural Light.

There is no Truth more evident, than that something must be from Eternity, since we ourselves Now are. (A) We never yet heard of any one so Unreasonable, or that could suppose so manifest a Contradiction, as a time wherein there was perfectly Nothing; this being of all Absurdities the greatest to imagine, that pure Nothing, the perfect Negation and Absence of all Being, should ever produce any real Existence. (B)

This

These things, then, have not the least Claim to Necessary, or Self-Existence; It remains, therefore, that these Characters are the sole, and unalterable Attributes of that Supreme Intelligent Being, who is absolutely, and in the highest Sense, Eternal, & the First Cause of all things.

(A) The Evidence of present Existence necessarily imports a prior Cause.

(B) It has been universally acknowledg'd, even by Atheists, who pretend to reason for their Opinions, that something must have existed from Eternity; and that "if there ever had been Nothing, there never could have been Any Thing." Indeed, It is difficult to imagine how

Serm. XVI.

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of the Universe to each other, such as between Animals and the Earth, Fishes and the Sea, the whole Terraqueous Globe and the Heavens, (as already proved,) this plainly discovers *Wisdom* in their Cause, but not their *necessary* Existence; which is absolute in itself, and unrelated to any thing.

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71

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These things, then, have not the least Claim to *Necessary*, or *Self-Existence*; It remains, therefore, that these Characters are the *sole*, and *unalterable* Attributes of that Supreme Intelligent Being, who is absolutely, and in the highest Sense, *Eternal*, & the *First Cause* of all things.

(A) The Evidence of present Existence necessarily imports a prior Cause.

(B) It has been universally acknowledged, even by Atheists, who pretend to reason for their Opinions, that *Something* must have existed from Eternity; and that "if there ever had been *Nothing*, there never could have been *Any Thing*." Indeed, It is difficult to imagine how

Serm. XVI.

This attribute of God therefore, is of all others, the least disputed among the Philosophers: indeed, all agree, that God is a Being endued with all Perfection, and possessed of perfect Happiness; but wherein that Happiness and Perfection consist, they widely differ. They all agree that God is eternal, and are as equally agreed what Eternity is, (viz.) an endless Duration.

The supreme God they looked-upon as without Beginning, and equally ascribed unto him a future Eternity. And,

Not only to Philosophers, but even to the meanest Capacities, are there obvious Arguments to prove clearly the Necessity of this divine Perfection, and to set it before them in a practical and useful Light. For,

Since it is, in some Degree, a Perfection to be, &c a greater Degree of that Perfection to continue in Being, it is evident that when we conceive of God, (the most perfect Being,) we must conceive him to be Infinite in this Perfection also, as well as in others.

this could be denied by any Man; for, we cannot conceive of a Commencement of Being otherwise than as an *Effect*: And an Effect without a Cause, is too palpable an Absurdity for any One to maintain.

Vain, therefore, are the Cavils of Unbelievers against the Eternity of God, which must equally affect their own Hypothesis.

others, (A) and that as his Power is not bounded by any opposite strength, nor his Immensity terminated by any Bounds of Place, so neither is his Duration limited by any Periods of Time; But, that he exists and lives, & governs all things, "from Everlasting to Everlasting," without Beginning of Time, or End of Days.

It is evident even to the meanest Capacity that he who first gave Being to all things, must be before the things that he made, and could not therefore have any Beginning himself, and must therefore Necessarily have existed from all Eternity (B).

But

(A) Whatever is *infinitely perfect*, must *necessarily* exist, since we perceive that *Necessary-Existence* is a *Perfection*, and that *Contingent-Existence* is an *Imperfection*, as it supposeth a Being produced by another, and depending upon it.

(B) The Idea of eternal Duration naturally forces itself upon the human Mind. We may, indeed, abstract from the Consideration of any particular Being, or of all Beings as existent in it, or we may imagine an eternal Nothing: but still, the Idea of Eternity will remain.

Now, The Difficulties which attend our Notion of the Divine Eternity, are no more than these; and therefore, are no more to be objected against it, being only equal with that of abstract Duration itself, which is inseparable from our Thoughts. The Truth is,

Such Reasonings only show us the Imperfection of our Understandings; that have real Ideas, familiar and unavoidable, of things which they cannot comprehend, [viz.] of Duration and Space; necessarily growing up to Infinity; too large, therefore, for the human Mind to grasp, being itself finite. We know they are, but do not know what

But further, Another Argument in Proof of the Eternity of God, is from the Intelligence of his Nature. It

they are; - We know they are both divisible into so small parts, that we cannot discern the least of them; and Both of so great an Extent, that we cannot attain to the Knowledge of their utmost Bounds.

Shall we, then, object against the Eternity of God, because it is Incomprehensible, when we cannot avoid thinking on, and being persuaded of Eternity, which, without him, is equally incomprehensible?

So that, if we find ourselves constrained to assent to this Proposition, that there is an uncaused Being, we seem to be under the same Necessity of acknowledging that Being to be without Beginning, (i.e.) absolutely Eternal. And, Tho' our Ideas of uncaused and eternal are *Negative*; yet, the Meaning of it is not, that nothing *Positive* is intended by them: for then they could not signify the Attributes of any Being - And consequently, *uncaused, eternal Existence* would be a Contradiction in Terms. But, the Negation is only of our fully understanding the Subject, and the Mind apprehends, as implied, the real Attributes of the Deity, which transcend our Capacity to conceive, in a positive Manner and Duration of Existence above our Comprehension, which we call *Infinite*.

This Notion of a future Eternity, which is natural to the Mind of Man, is an unanswerable Argument that he is a Being designed for it; especially, if we consider that he is capable of being Virtuous or Vicious here; - that he hath Faculties improveable to all Eternity; - and by a proper or wrong Employment of them, may be happy or miserable throughout that infinite Duration.

Our Idea, indeed, of this Eternity is not of an adequate or fixed Nature, but is perpetually growing and enlarging itself towards the Object, which is too big for human Comprehension. As we are now in the Beginning of Existence, so shall we always appear to ourselves as if we were forever entering upon it. After a Million or more of Centuries, some considerable thing already past, may slip out of our Memory.

It has been already proved, that Intelligènce is discovered in the Formation and Constitution of things, therefore, it must have been in the Origin of the World, & before it; for the Cause, (i:e) the Voluntary directing and contriving Cause must be before the Effect. Besides,

The very same Reasoning which demonstrates that some thing must have existed from Eternity, proves also that Understanding is Eternal, or without Beginning. For as Non-Entity could never have produced Being, so an Unintelligent Being could never have produced Understanding: The Conclusion therefore seems to be very evident that Intelligence is absolutely Eternal. Indeed,

The Ideas of Self-Existence and Eternity are so closely connected, that it is impossible to divide them. To be Self-Existent, is to exist by an absolute Necessity in the Nature of the Thing itself; & because it is impossible but Something must be Self-Existent, therefore it is necessary that it must likewise be Eternal: for, this Necessity being absolute, and not depending upon any thing External, must be always unalterably the same; Nothing being alterable, but what is capable of being affected by something without itself.

Imagine ourselves as just starting from the Goal, and find no Proportion between the Space which we know had a Beginning, and what we are sure will never have an End.

Serm. XVI.

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23

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That Being, therefore, which has no other Cause of its Existence, but the absolute Necessity of its own Nature; must of Necessity have existed from Everlasting, without Beginning; and must of Necessity exist to Everlasting, without End. "From Everlasting to Everlasting, - &c. - (under)

to Everlasting, Thou art God."

It is evident that he who hath already existed from all Eternity, and of himself, independently, cannot possibly be liable to be deprived of his Being, and Memory; which, if it be not strengthened in a wonderful manner, may possibly forget that ever there was a Sun or Planets. And yet, notwithstanding the long Race that we shall then have run, we shall still imagine ourselves as just starting from the Goal, and find no Proportion between the Space which we know had a Beginning, and what we are sure will never have an End.

Serm. XVI.

and must, therefore, Necessarily exist for an Eternity to come. (A) Besides, What further corroborates this, is, that even they among the Heathens, who had the lowest & meanest Conceptions of God, and who robbed him of as many Perfections as their imperfect Conceptions would permit them, are yet forced to attribute this to him, "How can we conceive of God, (say they,) but as an Eternal Being?" And,

The Reason of this is evident, for God being the Creator of all, could not receive his Being from them, for he must be before his Workmanship. If he had at any time a Beginning of Existence, then He only that gave that Being to him deserves to be called God; but, if nothing could give him his Being, nothing is able to take it away! & consequently it must be "everlasting," and independent.

Moreover, If God cease to be, it must be by some Internal Principles, which would incline him to Corruption, as the Case is with human Bodies. Now,

He cannot cease to be from any Outward Cause, that can destroy him; if so, that Cause would be more

(A) The First of Beings, uncaused by any other, exists in a way Superior to, and more excellent than all others; all the Periods of Beginningless and Endless Eternity are connected in him. There never was any time when he was not, - and He shall endure forever.

more powerful : (A) Nor from any Inward Principles, for the Divine Nature is pure & uncompounded, spiritual, & undivided, & therefore, can admit of no Destruction, by the Dissolution of those Principles, of which it doth not consist. Again,

That God is Everlasting is further evident, because it would be the greatest Imperfection we could attribute to his Being ; for the more perfect his Being otherwise is, the greater Imperfection would it be for him to have an End ; so excellent a Nature to cease to be, would be an infinite Abasement to all his other Perfections. Indeed,

It would hinder several of his Perfections, and contradict their Being, (viz.) His Self-Existence, had he not always been of himself ; - his Necessary-Existence also ; - for, that is not Necessary which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is.

Again, It would much abate the Duty of the Creature, as we could not have that Assurance of his Promise, and that Security of the Recompense of the next life, if the Continuance of his Being,

(who

(B) Nothing that once actually has a Being, can ever cease to be, but by an Act of a Superior Being annihilating it : But, there being nothing Superior to the Deity, it is impossible that it should ever cease to be : What was Self-Existent from all Eternity, must also be so to all Eternity ; for it is impossible that a Simple Essence can annihilate itself, as that it can make itself.

Serm. XVI.

(who is to be the Disposer of them,) were Uncertain. Now,

These Absurdities, & these Inconveniences following from the Denial of this Perfection to God, is a sufficient Evidence that it belongs unto him. But,

II. I am to prove it from Scripture or Divine Revelation.

God is in Scripture stiled "the Everlasting God;" as when St Paul saith, "the Gospell was made manifest according to the Commandment of the Everlasting God;" and "the Everlasting or Eternal King," because "his Dominion endureth thro'out all ages."

And, - Whereas all earthly Kingdoms have their Rise and Fall, "his Kingdom shall have no End."

Again, he is declared to be God "from Everlasting to everlasting. Which Expression, (say the Jewish Doctors,) is the constant Phrase, by which they, with the Scripture, signify what is most properly Eternal. So saith the Psalmist, in the Text; "Before the Mountains were brought forth, or ever the Earth and the World were made," - "From Everlasting to Everlasting, Thou art God." But further,

There are innumerable Places which speak of the Eternity of God directly. [viz] "Thou art the Everlasting God," - "the Eternal God;" and, (which

(which is to the same Purpose,) "he that inhabiteth Eternity." And,

This, as it is attributed to his Being, so likewise is it in respect of all his other Perfections; "The Mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting for his Mercy endureth forever," — "His eternal Power." — "The King eternal."

Those Doxologies which the Scriptures use, are but so many Acknowledgements of this Attribute.

"Blessed be the Lord forever & ever." — "To whom be Glory and Honour, Thanksgiving and Praise, Might, Majesty & Dominion, for ever & ever." &c.

Higher we may refer all those places which speak of him as without Beginning: "Thou, O Lord, art from Everlasting." And,

Those which speak of his perpetual Duration, as, "Thy Years are throughout all Generations; of Old shou hast laid the Foundations of the Earth, & the Heavens are the Works of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure: they shall all of them wax old like a Garment, & as a Vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and thy Years shall not fail." And,

Those which speak of him as the First and the Last; as, "Before me there was no God, neither after me shall there be any." — "I am the First, and I

am the Last, and besides me there is no God." And,

To mention no more, those which speak of his Being, as co-existent to all Difference of time, past, present, and to come. "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning & the End, (saith the Lord,) which is, & which was, & which is to come, the Almighty."

God, then, is "without Beginning of Time, or End of Days." — "From Everlasting, to Everlasting, Thou art God." But,

Lastly, I am to see what Inferences & Improvements can be made from hence, for the Information of our Judgments, & the Reformation of our Lives.

First, For the Information of our Judgments.

And here, Is God Eternal? Then hence it will follow that he is Independent in his Being, & in all his other Perfections. (A) For, He

(A) There is no Attribute which appears more venerable than this of absolute independant Eternity. Tho it is but little we know of it, yet that little fills the Mind with the greatest Awe, and rises an Idea of Magnificence, unparallelled in the whole Circle of Being. 'Tis this which holds-together the whole Series of Successive-Existence and establishes a Connection of past, present, and to come. Under the Consideration of an Eternal Intelligence, Self-Existent, & immutable, the same Yesterday, To-Day, and forever, every thing appears in a fair and amiable Light. However Variable the exterior Face of Nature may be, there is a permanent Wisdom in the Cause, which directs the Beginning of things, even to the End; which establishes their Continuance, and unites them to a Central-Point.

He that is the first of all, could not receive his Being, nor any other of his excellent Qualifications, which necessarily exist with it, from any that was after him, seeing the Cause must be before the Effect. It is a Contradiction to affirm that any other Being can be before the first, according to that Enquiry of the Apostle, "Who hath first given to him, that he may repay him," for "of him, and from him, & to him, are all things." But,

Secondly, Is it the Property of God to be Eternal? Then,

Hence we may certainly conclude, that our Blessed Saviour must be God; For,

He that was "like to the Son of Man," said to St. John, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, which was, and is, & is to come." Again,

Thirdly, Is this Attribute peculiar to the true God?

Hence, therefore, we may argue, and easily infer also, that the Holy Spirit must be God, He being styled, by the Apostle, "The Eternal Spirit." But,

For the Reformation of our Lives.

Will God endure forever? This shows the Safety and Happiness of the Soul that hath an Interest in him.

him. So Moses describes the Happiness of his People, "The eternal God is thy Refuge, & thy Dwelling-Place, & underneath are the everlasting Arms; happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee?"

The Reason of this is plain; for, by having an Interest in this God, we are secure from evil, and are preserved in all Dangers, as having "the everlasting Arms" still ready to support us.

Our Happiness moreover is great, from the Enjoyment of the greatest and most lasting Blessings, He being our Dwelling-Place, "in whose Presence there is Fullness of Joy;" and who, being an eternal God, must ever live to confer fresh & never-failing Blessings on us.

To secure us of perfect Happiness, there can be nothing further requisite, than to believe that He, in whom we have an Interest, will be forever able to render our Condition happy.

Of all this, God's faithful Servants are assured from his Eternity; for, as his Being is eternal, so are all his Perfections, both his Wisdom, & Power & Goodness: As he is ever able to defend us from Evil, so his Goodness will incline him to it, & confer all Favours upon us.

God's love to his Servants is an everlasting Love; for, thus saith the Lord, "I have loved thee with

Inferences.

An everlasting Love, therefore, with Loving-Kindness have I drawn thee.

"The Mercy of the Lord endureth forever," - "is from everlasting to everlasting" towards them that fear him, to such as keep his Covenant, and remember his Commandments to do them."

So that if our Hearts do not wickedly depart from God; if they do not condemn us of Insincerity in our Endeavours to yield Obedience to his holy Will, we may then rest secure of an Interest in his Favour, who is "the ever-living God, and steadfast for ever."

Secondly, Doth God endure for evermore? This may encourage us to place our Trust and Confidence in him. For,

It is He only who is Eternal, in whom alone Immortal Souls can find any true ground of Confidence, according to the Exhortation of the Prophet: "Trust ye in the Lord forever; for, in the Lord Jehovah is Everlasting Strength."

Whatever else we rest upon, or fly-to for Refuge, must be unable and insufficient to be unto us a sure Ground of Confidence, as being both of a frail Nature and fading; and therefore either apt to fail us, or to fall away itself.

"Put not your Trust, therefore, in Princes", "nor in any son of man, in whom there is no Help; for

Serm. XVI.

when

when his Breath goeth-ferth, he shall turn-again to his Earth, and then all his thoughts perish."

The Prophet Isaiah useth the same Consideration to abate our Confidence in mortal man: "Cease from man, whose Breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of," they being but lying Refuges compar'd to the Eternal God, whose Power can never wax faint, nor fail to do them good, who place their Trust and Confidence in him, "who is the Rock of Ages."

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the Ends of the Earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" And, having such a Friend, whose Power, & Loye, & Wisdom are as eternal as himself, how can the Soul, that hath an Interest in him, be disquieted with Fears that any real Evil shall befall him, or any Blessing be wanting to him?

The Power, the Goodness, the Mercy, and all the other Perfections of God, are as eternal & unchangeable as his Being. On this Security the Mind of man, (after a life of Virtue,) may rely with full Satisfaction; & they who love Righteousness will be joyful in it: Other Security there is none, nor any thing that can afford sufficient Comfort & Support in the Day of Adversity.

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A wise man, therefore, will, above all things, endeavour to secure to himself the Favour of Him who liveth for ever, and who alone can crown him with Immortality and Eternal Life. "Hearken unto me, ye that love Righteousness, the People in whose heart is my law, fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their Reviling; for the Moth shall eat them up as a Garment, and the Worm, shall eat them as Wool; but my Righteousness shall be for ever, and my Salvation from Generation to Generation." — Yea, "The Mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him; and his Righteousness upon Children's Children."

This also is the Encouragement which the Apostle gives the persecuted Jews, to continue steadfast in the Faith, (viz.) that they "believe in that Jesus, who is the same Yesterday, To-Day, and For-ever," &c. therefore, will be ever ready to assist, and reward to the utmost, his faithful Servants: "Therefore, we Christians, (says he,) both labour and suffer Reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe." But further,

The Doctrine before us, is an Argument why the Providence of God ought not to be cavilled at;

nor

nor his Promises doubted of, even though there be no present Appearance of the Performance of them, nor immediate Way of explaining the Methods of them.

Other Beings, who have Command only of the present Time, if they cannot immediately accomplish what they undertake, it is uncertain but that some Change in their State, or in the Nature and Course of things, may prevent them from being able to accomplish it at all: But,

God, having in his Hands the Power of all Time alike, can never be involved in any Difficulty, hindered by any intervening Accidents, perplexed by any Change of things or Circumstances, nor influenced by any Length or Periods of Time, being in himself All-wise, Omnipotent, Self-sufficient, and Eternal, and therefore is at all times able & willing to perform his remotest Promises, and to extricate the most perplexed Appearances in the Methods of his Providence. (A)

Senseless, therefore, is the Objection of those Scoffers, whom the Apostle foretells "should come in the last

(A) "As a Drop of Water unto the Sea, and a Gravel-Stone in Comparison of the Sand, so are a thousand Years to the Days of Eternity." - "Therefore is God patient with them, and poureth forth his Mercy upon them." - "He saw & perceived their End to be evil, therefore he multiplied his Compassion."

last days, walking after their own Lusts, and saying, Where is the Promise of his Coming? For, since the Fathers fell-asleep, all things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation. — To which we have this true and plain Answer:

"Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that One Day is with the Lord as a Thousand Years, & a Thousand Years as One Day." Again,

The Eternity of God will encourage in us a true Christian Obedience, as knowing that we serve him who can give us an everlasting Reward.

As the Promise of our future Reward is founded on the Goodness of God; and the Greatness of it, on his Power; so the Duration of it, in his Eternity.

Now, What an exceeding Encouragement is this to us, that we serve him, and suffer for him, who lives for ever; and therefore can, and will make us happy forever!

When we serve the Great Men of this World, tho' secure of their Affection, yet we are uncertain of their Lives; this discourages many, and makes them worship the rising Sun: But,

He that serves God, serves the "Everlasting King," who ever lives to dispense Rewards to all those who are faithful to him. But,

Serm. XVI. Fourthly,

Fourthly, Is God Eternal in his Duration and Power, and in all his other Attributes? Then,

What can be more effectual, (If but duly weighed and frequently reflected on,) than is this Consideration to reduce the obstinate Sinner, who rests secure in the strong Holds of Iniquity, from a Continuance in his sinful Courses.

Were men duly sensible, that an Almighty, just, and sin-revenging God, will live forever, to execute his Wrath, and make his Power known, in punishing the stubborn Sinner, it would then be with us, as with those of Sion, of whom the Prophet speaks thus: "The Sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness hath surprised the Hypocrites; Who among us, (say they,) can dwell with devouring Fire? Who can endure everlasting Burnings?"

Who can dwell in that place of Torment "where the Worm dieth not, & the Fire is not quenched?"

For, as the Wrath of God is founded on his vindictive Justice, and in the Purity of his divine Nature, which can never admit defiled Souls into his Presence, so the Continuance of it depends on his Eternity.

The Consideration of his Omnipotence makes it very dreadful, but that of his Eternity renders it much more so, making it perpetual. "It is a fearful Thing to fall into the Hands of the ever-living God;"

deavours, be powerful to check the Importunity of Temptation itself.

Our being actually convinced of this, as it will fill us with Reverence towards his Majesty, (whose Throne is from Generation to Generation); so it will create Horror at the Guilt of sin, which, opposing such an eternal Being, exposes to an eternal Punishment from his Presence, who for ever lives to inflict it; with whom our past Sins are always present, and can never be forgotten; before whom our Age is as nothing, and all the tempting Enjoyments of the World as things that are not, and therefore not deserving an Heart to be set upon them, because our Portion for ever, can only be God, who liveth and remaineth for ever. (A)

This is another Inference from the Doctrine before us.

If God be eternal, then let him be our Portion & our Choice, and let all our Actions be directed to the Enjoyment of him, as knowing that in Him alone is everlasting Happiness; for, as "in his Presence there is Fullness of Joy;" so, "at his right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore."

If
(A) Deus est Summum Bonum.

Inferences. 7. 10

If we neglect to make our Friendship with him in this Day of Grace, we shall be sure to find him an everlasting Enemy.

Let us compare all other Portions which we can enjoy, with that which the devout Psalmist mentions in these Words: "The Lord is the Portion of mine Inheritance," and we shall easily discern the vast Advantage, and consequently the Wisdom of his Choice.

"Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon Earth that I desire in Comparison of thee;" "for, when my Strength & my Heart faileth me, then is God the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever." But further,

The Eternity of God is a Prelude and a Confirmation of our own: for we are assured that after the Resurrection, at the Consummation of all things, "we shall be like him; for, we shall see him as he is."

This may sufficiently animate us against Death & all the Terrors of it. I shall use the words of Wisdom.

"God created Man to be immortal, & made him to be an Image of his own Eternity. Nevertheless, thro Envy of the Devil came Death into the World, and they that do hold on his side do find it. But, the Souls of the Righteous are in the hand of God,

Serm. XVI.

and

Of the Eternity of God.

and there shall no Torment touch them. In the Sight of the Unwise they seemd to die; and their Departure is taken for Misery, and their going from us to be utter Destruction; but, they are in Peace. For, tho they be punished in the Sight of Men: yet is their Hope full of Immortality: and having been a little chastened, they shall be greatly rewarded; for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. As Gold in the Furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a Burnt-Offering. And in the time of their Visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like Sparks among the Stubble - they shall judge the Nations, and have Dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign forever."

This also should induce us to provide for Eternity, which will never have an End: "For,

"As a Drop of Water unto the Sea, & a Gravel-Stone in Comparifon of the Sand, so are a thousand Years to the Days of Eternity."

That the Soul is immaterial, and therefore immortal, has always been acknowledged even by the thinking part of the Heathen World. (A) But,

Revelation

(A) *Et meliora tui parte Superflua erit.*

The Elder Cato is represented by Cicero, looking forward, as it were, from the Verge of extreme Old Age, into a future State, and rising

Revelation, (among innumerable Advantages which

lead into a Contemplation on the imperishable part of his Nature, and its Existence after Death, speaking thus to Scipio and Lælius.

"This is my firm Persuasion, that since the human Soul exerts itself with so great Activity; - since it hath such a Remembrance of the past, and such a Concern for the future; - since it is enriched with so many Arts, Sciences & Discoveries, it is impossible, but that the Being which contains all these, must be immortal." — "No one shall persuade me, *Scipio*, that your worthy Father, or your Grand-Fathers *Paulus* and *Africanus*, or *Africanus* his Father or Uncle, or many other excellent Men whom I need not name, perform'd so many Actions to be remembered by Posterity, without being sensible that Futurity was their Right. And, if I may be allowed an Old Man's Privilege to speak of myself, do you think I would have endur'd the Fatigue of so many wearisome Days and Nights, both at home and abroad, if I imagined that the same Boundary which is set to my Life, must terminate my Glory? Were it not more despicable to have worn out my days in Ease & Tranquility, free from Labour, & without Emulation? But, I know not how my Soul has always rais'd itself, and looked forward on Futurity, in this View and Expectation, that when it shall depart out of this Life, it shall then live forever; And, if this be not true, that the Mind is immortal, the Souls of the most Worthy would not, above all others, have the strongest Impulse for Glory.

"What besides this, is the Cause that the Wise Men die with the greatest Equanimity, the Ignorant with the greatest Concern? Does it not seem that those Minds which have the most extensive Views, foresee they are removing to a happier Condition, which those of narrower Sight do not perceive? I, for my part, am transported with the Hope of seeing your Ancestors, whom I have honoured and loved; and am earnestly desirous of meeting, not only those excellent Persons whom I have known, but those too of whom I have heard and read, and of whom I myself have written; nor would I be detained from so pleasing

which we receive from it;) has set this Subject in so clear a Light, as to render it indubitable. And yet, what little Care is taken by the Generality of Mankind to secure it's eternal Happiness. The Body & it's perishing Concerns, are too apt to engross our whole Attention, till Sickness or the near View of approaching Death, alarm our Fears, then we see our Folly, and lament it. But,

How different the Language, composed the Mind and Will of a good Man at that awful Period! The Interest of his Soul has been his principal Care thro Life; & therefore, he has nothing now to do but to give it back into the Hands of his Redeemer, who He is well-assured, will keep what He thus commits to him, untill the great Day.

What Folly, then, is it, to neglect the Welfare of our ever-precious, never-dying Souls, to make Provision for that Body, which, (after all our Care,) must ere long return to that Earth from whence it came. (A)

Let us but once suppose that Death had done it's Office, and the Soul dislodged, and launched into the

a Journey. O happy Day! when I shall escape from this Crowd, this Heap of Pollution, and be admitted to that divine Assembly of exalted Spirits!

(A) See No. 575 of the Spectator.

the eternal World, Judgement past, and it's State
fixed forever, ten-thousand Ages past and gone,
ten thousand Millions more, - and Eternity but
still beginning — What shall we then think of the
few Moments of the busy Vanity, which we shall
but just remember that we once spent upon Earth?

(A) May we not many Millions of Ages hence,
(when the Time past seems but even as a Dream to
us

(A) "Eternity! thou pleasing, dreadful Thought!

Thro' what Variety of untr'd Being,

Thro' what new Scenes and Changes must thou pass!

The wide, th' unbounded Prospect lies before us;

But Shadows, Clouds and Darkness rest upon it."

The Soul, secur'd in her Existence, smiles

At the drawn Dagger, and defies it's point;

The Stars shall fade away, the Sun himself

Grow dim with Age, and Nature sink in Years;

But Thou shalt flourish in immortal Youth;

Unhurt amidst the War of Elements,

The Wreck of Matter, and the Crush of Worlds."

Iustum et tenacem Propositi Firmitas

Non Civium Arder præva iubarum

Non Vultus instantis Tyranni

Mente quærit solidâ, neque Anxietate

Precursantibus magna Jovis Manus,

Si fractus illabatur Orbis,

Impavidum serient Ruina;

Mens intacta manet, superat, ridetque Dolores.

Serm. XVI,

us now,) may we not forget that we ever liv'd here? Or, if we shall remember it forever, what shall we then think of it? - Shall we think of it in the same manner as we now do? - To be as important, as at present? It is most certain we shall not; No: our Eyes will be then opened forever. And, if we are happy, we shall upbraid ourselves, in the midst of all our Bliss, that we did no more for our God and Saviour, for our Souls and eternal Happiness, during the short Space of Time which was allowed us on Earth to provide for Eternity. And, if we are miserable, our incessant Self-Reproaches will be insupportable, that with all our affected Wit & Wisdom, we should have so foolishly suffered ourselves to be led-away by vain Appearances, and the false Images of Fancy, as to forget Eternity, and neglect our everlasting Interests, tho' we were so often importuned, called upon, and most earnestly intreated to think of, and provide for them.

Our Souls are immaterial Beings, what Correspondence, therefore, can there be between them & material things? They are of a spiritual Nature, what Advantage, therefore, can they reap from things earthly? None. Not even "God and Mammon" are, or can be more divided than are these things.

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It is an immortal Soul that God hath given us, whereas all worldly things are perishing; we ought by no means, therefore, to seek Comfort to ourselves in them, even though we should have "Goods laid up for many Years;" for, what is an Estate only for Years, to a Soul that will endure to all Eternity! When these, our many Years, are past and gone, if we have purchased nothing more lasting to our Souls, will they not hereafter suffer an Eternal Famine? rather indeed, an eternal Torment?

This Thought, well weighed, must make us serious, and awaken all the Powers of our Souls in good earnest to make our eternal Interests our chief Care, "For, glorious is the Fruit of good Labours, and the root of Wisdom shall never fall away."

Let us not, then, place our Felicity on fleeting Objects, nor stretch out our hands to grasp at Shadows. Let us not build our Joys on aerial Foundations, nor place our Hopes on the Phantoms of a waking Dream; But, having eternal Souls, let us endeavour that we may ever have an Interest in this eternal God; for, to Eternity they must endure: And, what can more concern us, than that it should be an happy, and not a miserable Eternity.

A portion in this Life is too frequently the sad Lot of them who have no Interest in the Life to come;

and so, must hereafter be for ever miserable: but a Portion in that God, who lives for ever, is Happiness for ever.

That which crowns the Joys of Heaven, is the Consideration that this most happy state will be eternal, and have no End, but that after the period of many Ages, there still remains a long Eternity to succeed, depending upon the Existence of that God, who ever lives to confer it.

To Conclude, How can we sufficiently prostrate ourselves, and fall down before our Maker, when we consider that ineffable Goodness and Wisdom which contrived this Existence for finite Natures?

What must be the Overflowings of that Good-Will, which prompted our Creator to adapt Existence to Beings, in whom it is not necessary? Especially when we consider, that he himself was before in the complete Possession of Existence and of Happiness, & in the full Enjoyment of Eternity.

What man can think of himself, as called out, & separated from Nothing, - of his being made a conscious, a reasonable, and a happy Creature; in a Word, - of being taken-in as a Sharer of Existence, & Partner with him in Eternity, without being swallowed up in Wonder, in Praise, and Adoration!

It

It

It is, indeed, a Thought too vast for the Mind of Man, and rather to be entertained in the Secrecy of Devotion, and in the Silence of the Soul, than to be expressed by Words. The Supreme Being has not given us Powers or Faculties sufficient to extol and magnify such unutterable Goodness.

It is, however, some Comfort to us, that we shall be always doing what we shall never be able to do, and that a Work, which cannot be finished, will however be the Work of an Eternity.

SERMON XVII.

Of the Paternity of God.

Ephe. iv. 6. "One God, and Father of all."

The Unity of the Divine Nature hath been already considered; (A) my Intention, therefore, is, to enforce the Doctrine here further confirmed to us; (viz) the endearing Attribute of God's Paternity over us — "One God, and Father of all."

In speaking to this, I shall,

First, See how, and in what Instances his Fatherly Care over us is expressed towards us, and the different Notions in which it is to be explained; And then, Secondly, what Inferences and Improvements can be made from it. And,

First, Amongst the Titles and Characters given to the Almighty, that of Universal Father, hath been ascrib'd to him, not only by the Writers of the Old and New Testament, but by the general and ancient Consent of all civilized Nations.

Christianity

(A) Sermon XII.

Christianity, indeed, hath enabled us to see more distinctly than either the Gentiles or the Jews, the several accounts on which God is our Father.

This Title, in many respects, truly and properly belongs to him: we are his Children, as we are his Creatures, made, preserved, & maintained by him; as we are intellectual Creatures, formed in his Image; (A)

As by the Practice of Virtue and Goodness we still more resemble him, & enjoy his particular Favour; as we are Christians adopted into his heavenly Family, renewed by his Assistance; and acknowledged as Brethren by his only-begotten Son, who partook of a peculiar Sonship from him; and, as we are designed to inherit eternal Life:

By right of Creation we are peculiarly his, which is a kind of Generation:

By right of Conservation, which is a paternal Act

(A) As the whole World derives its Being from God, he is so that Account filed "The Father of all." But, as rational Creatures are produced, not only by him, but in his Image and Likeness, he is, in a stricter Sense, the Father of these. And therefore, Angels & Men are called in Scripture, what the Animals beneath them never are, "the Sons," and "the Offspring of God." In which Sense the Prophet saith, "O Lord, thou art our Father, and we are all the Work of thy hands."

Serm. XVII.

And, (A) and on which account Job reckoned himself to be a Father to the poor and fatherless. Again,

God is our Father by way of Education and Governance, extended towards all men, and more particularly evinced towards good men; He governs and educates all men as their Father, by wholesome Instructions of his Word & Providence, by necessary and seasonable Corrections; by compassionating the miserable and presiding over all in Dignity & Age, with Goodness and Affection, being Father, as he is Prince of the Universe, and as the prime Original of our Stock, being before & above all things, stil'd "the Ancient of Days," and, "by whom all things are," and, therefore, eminently the "Father of All."

Among all these proper Senses, in which God is truly stiled Father, I shall only here consider the two most eminent of them, [viz] Our receiving our Creation and spiritual Adoption from him; on which Accounts we are peculiarly his, "as Sons of a very and true Father." And,

First. God is the Father, or Author of all things, originally Creating and giving them Being.

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(A) Of this, all Mankind have large Experience; not only in the many Enjoyments, Comforts and Deliverances; that he grants us; but even in the Afflictions which he sends us, always for our Benefit; than more especially "dealing with us as with Children, whom he loveth".

In this Sense, the wisest of the ancient Philosophers, among the Heathens, styled God, "The Father of the Universe." And, it is the constant Practice of the Poets to speak of all their Gods, especially of Jupiter, by that Appellation:

God and Father are Terms almost inseparable in Homer; "Father of Gods and Men," is his almost constant Invocation; & by this Title, the supreme Essence is more generally known in his Writings, than by any other.

This is intioned only to show that Nature seems to dictate a Notion of Paternity or Fatherhood being implied by Creation. And,

The Scriptures sometimes use Expressions of the same Nature. Moses calls the Creation, "The Generation of the Heavens and the Earth;" Now,

If Generation be the same with Creation; Generator and Father, must be the same with Creator.

The Prophet Malachi, indeed, plainly asserts Creation to be sufficient to constitute a Right of Paternity; "Have we not," (saith he,) "all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" Thus again,

When St. Paul had declared, that "to us there is but one God," he immediately gives a Definition who that one God is, by adding, "The Father, of whom are all things;" (i.e) from whom all things

derive their Existence, & are brought into Being by his Will and Power.

The like Manner of speaking we find again in the Text, "One God, and Father of All, who is above all, and through all, and in all."

"Father of all," (i.e.) Author and Creator of all things.

So the Word is used in the Creed, when we declare that we believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

This First Notion of God's Paternity, then, founded on Creation, (figuratively as it were for Procreation,) is universal, & as ancient as Creation itself.

This is the utmost Latitude of Signification to which the Word can possibly be extended; it reaching in this Sense to things both Rational and Irrational, Animate and Inanimate; making God truly and properly, in the fullest and most literal Sense, "The Father of the Universe." But,

More commonly the Word is used in Scripture in a Sense more restrained, and with regard only to Rational and Intelligent Beings, God being peculiarly styled Father, with respect to those to whom he hath given Life and Understanding; but Creator or Maker only, with respect to inanimate things, to whom he hath communicated only simple Being.

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This is he stiled by the Apostle, "The Father of Spirits," and "The Father, of whom the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named."

Father and Family are relative Terms; and it is a noble Idea which this Text gives us of God, representing the Whole Universe as the House of God, framed and preserved by his Wisdom and Power; and all Orders of intelligent Beings, as the Family of God, under the Government of his Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness, in their several and respective Stations.

In this sense Angels are stiled the Sons of God: "The Morning-Stars sang together, & all the Sons of God shouted for Joy;" (i.e.) the Angels rejoiced and praised God at the Time of the Creation of the visible World. And,

The same Assembly, (who are stiled the Host of Heaven,) are in another place, equally so termed: "I saw the Lord, (saith the Prophet Micah,) sitting on his Throne, & all the Host of Heaven standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left;" these also are, in another Description of the like Vision, called "the Sons of God" Again,

"There was a Day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord." And, Nebuchadnezzar "saw four men loose, walking in the midst

Serm. XVII.

midst of the fire, and the Form of the fourth, (says he,) was like the Son of God; or, like a Son of God, (i.e.) like an Angel, as the same person is stiled in the 28th verse of the same chapter.

Upon the same Account, [viz] our having received Life from the Hands of God, "the Life of an Intelligent and Rational Being," our first Father, Adam, is called the Son of God," "which was the Son of Adam, which was the Son of God." And,

All Mankind, (considered as Creatures endued with Reason and Understanding, in Opposition to Idols, which have neither Sense nor Understanding, nor Life,) are said to be the Offspring of God; "in him we live, & move, and have our Being, (as certain also of your own Poets have said); for we also are his Offspring." And further, in this text, "Forasmuch, then as we are the Offspring of God."

This, therefore, is the first and original Sense in which God is, in Scripture, called our Father.

It signifies our deriving from him our Being and Life. All things are his Creatures, but intelligent Beings only are his Sons. Thus far is God our Father by Nature. But,

Secondly, There is still a higher and more peculiar Sense, in which the Scripture represents God as being

being our Father, spiritually, by Redemption, Religion and Grace.

Concerning the first, Moses speaks thus unto the Israelites: "Is not he thy Father who bought thee?" And thus the Prophet, "Doubtless thou art our Father; tho Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not, thou, O Lord, art our Father, "our Redeemer."

Nor is this Natural, the only Foundation of this Relation between God and us; there is also a Civil and Voluntary one, (viz) Adoption, by which it may be constituted, where it never, in any sense, subsisted before.

That our Title, therefore, might be perfect, altho we were before the Children of God both by Nature and Redemption, he hath added this also; — Concerning which St. Paul speaks thus: "Ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

The true Explication of which Notion may be rightly set-forth in the following manner:

As God is, in general, the Father of all intelligent Beings, and rational; so is he, in a more peculiar and exalted manner, the Father of him, who, in Scripture, is stil'd "The Only-Begotten Son;" "The

Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person;" "The Image of the invisible God, and the first begotten of every Creature."

By the Interposition of this Divine Person, (the only-begotten Son,) "it pleased the Father, (saith St. Paul,) to reconcile all things to himself:" - "By him, (saith he,) to reconcile all things, whither they be things in Earth, or things in Heaven."

The Meaning is, that the whole World of rational Creatures, (being considered as the Family of God, of whom, both in Heaven and in Earth, it is named,) are represented by the Apostle, as govern'd by the only-begotten Son, "whom the Father hath given to be Head over all things; that he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, & which are in Earth, even in Him."

By Sin men reject themselves, and, (in the divine Justice,) are rejected out of this Household of God, and "are no more worthy to be called Sons." But,

By true Repentance and Amendment of Life, thro Faith, made available through the Intercession of Christ, our great High-Priest, "they, who were sometimes alienated, and Enemies in their minds by wicked Works, are again reconciled, & through him have Access again, by one Spirit unto the Father; and are no more Strangers and Foreigners, but Fellow-

Fellow-Citizens with the Saints, and of the Household of God."

This Restoring of Sinners by Repentance and Reformation of Life, thro the Mediation of Christ, to the Favour of God, is elegantly stil'd by St. Paul, "God, our Father's Adoption of Children by Jesus Christ to himself."

The Effect of which Reconciliation to those who, by the Practice of Virtue & Righteousness, continue to live worthy of their most holy Calling, is, that Christ is not "ashamed to call them Brethren," & that God himself vouchsafes them the Denomination of Sons.

"Behold what manner of Love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God!" &, that consequently "we have Access with Confidence to the Throne of Grace, as to a merciful and reconciled Father."—"Ye have received the Adoption of Sons; &, because ye are Sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your Hearts, crying Abba, Father; Wherefore thou art no more a Servant, but a Son; and if a Son, then an Heir of God, though Christ; yea, Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ."

"We are begotten again, then, thro his Gospel to an heavenly Hope; to an Inheritance reserved in

Heaven for us"; — Privileges so invaluable, that tho He is doubtless a Father, and a tender One, to our whole Species, yet his Word speaks of US, as the only Persons, in Comparison, that have a right to consider him in this View. "As many as received him" (i:e) our Blessed Saviour, "to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God; even to them that believe on his Name: which are born, not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man; But of God." "The Lord is good to all"; but singularly good to those, who become, by the Influence of the Christian Covenant, singularly fit Objects of his Goodness. They have Promises of the largest Blessings, to which nothing, but Promise, can intitle: Pardon of sin, Assistance of the Holy-Spirit, & Life eternal; by which last they are made, in the happiest Sense, Children of God, being Children of the Resurrection."

In Consequence of this State of Reconciliation, our Saviour, in all his Discourses, constantly represents God as having the tender Care and Affection of a Father towards us: he teaches us to acknowledge him, and to look up to him as our Father, upon the Account of his continual Providence in preserving us; his Love, in revealing himself to us by his Son; his Goodness in redeeming us, and in being ready to assist

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(231)

assist us by his Spirit; his Mercy, in forgiving our Offences; his Authority, mixed with the greatest Patience, in correcting us, not as earthly Parents, "after their own Pleasure, but for our Profit, to the Intent that in the End, we might be Partakers of our Hope." And,

To encourage us to pray to him, he lays before us that moving and most pathetic Argument recorded in the Gospel, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, your Father which is in Heaven, give good things to them that ask him?"

Upon both these Considerations, as well as that of his Benignity towards us, (viz.) on account of our Natural and Spiritual Sonship, and the many Favours which he confers upon us, it is, that we are taught, in that divine Form of Prayer given us by our blessed Lord and Saviour, to address God himself, under that endearing Appellation of "Our Father, which art in Heaven." And,

Our Church, frequently the same, (viz.) "Almighty and most merciful Father." —

"We humbly beseech thee, O Father." — "Almighty God, Father of all Mercies." and the like.

Let us learn, then, from this Representation of
Serm. XVII, the

the Almighty, to magnify in our souls, that gracious Redeemer, who hath made God, a Father to US, more than He is to others. Let us often repeat the thankful Reflection of St. John; — "Behold what Manner of Love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God!" And, (as already said,) joyfully argue, as St. Paul doth, "If Children, then Heirs; Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ."

In the Writings, indeed, of some Authors, God seems, at times, to be represented to us under a different Character, as "an hard Master, expecting to reap where he has not sown, and to gather where he has not sowed." But,

Such Representations are Consequences only of men's private Opinions, & not taught, but reprov'd in Scripture. For,

God is Love, and Kindness, and Benignity; and consequently loves and does good to all his Creatures, and "his tender Mercies are over all his Works." Only, against wilful Wickedness is he, indeed, irreconcilably severe; & Unrighteousness is his Abomination. Therefore,

When we say that God is our Father, we profess our Belief, that he is the Author and Preserver of
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the Universe, who governs all things with Paternal Care; but extends his Favours especially to those, who, by imitating & obeying him, shew themselves his true Children: and therefore, most especially to such, as having acquired, by the Merits and Death of his Son, the nearest Relation and Resemblance to him, have a Covenant-Right by it, to an eternal Inheritance in that blessed place, where he exhibits his Glory, and reigns, possessed of sovereign Authority, and boundless Power.

Having thus seen how, & in what Instances God's Fatherly Care is expressed towards us, & the different Notions in which it is to be explained, I am,

II. To see what Inferences can be drawn from it.

And here, The Consideration of this Relation of God to us, tends to inform & admonish us concerning many necessary Duties resulting thence, and to enforce upon us the Practice of them.

The Returns which are due from us, as from Children to our Heavenly Father, are abundant Honour, absolute Obedience and Submission, chearful Compliance, Imitation, Trust and Confidence, Resignation and Contentment, and a Love to our Brethren, as Fellow-Creatures. And,

Serm. XVII.

First

First, It may, in general, & should put us in mind of the Reverence and Honour due to God from us, as from Children to their Father, & that too, on the most obliging Account.

"A Son honoureth his Father, and a Servant his Master; If I then," (as saith God by his Prophet Malachi,) "be a Father, where is my Honour?"

Now, To Honour God, is, to have such an high & awful Sense of Reverence for him, as he deserves, upon the Account of his Greatness, his Excellency, & the Authority which he hath over us; - As, when in our Esteem of God, as infinite in Power & Justice, we fear him, - as infinite in Mercy & Goodness, we love him, - and, as infinite in Wisdom, Faithfulness, and Truth, we trust and confide in him. By these inward Operations of the Soul, suitable to the Excellencies of the Divine Nature, we give to God that inward Honour that is due unto him.

To this our Inward Homage, we must add an Outward dutiful Obedience; without which all our other Professions of Esteem for his Excellencies are hypocritical and insincere, and will be rejected as such. - "Herein, (saith our Blessed Saviour,) is my Father honoured, that ye bear much Fruit:" (i.e.) the Fruit of Holiness in our Lives and Conversations; and by which only it is, that we can best
demonstrate

demonstrate the inward Homage and Esteem we have for him. But further,

The Word Father implies in it Dominion and Authority, claiming Obedience and Subjection from Children.

From the extensive Nature of Paternal Right among men, we may judge of the Authority which God hath over us, as he is our Father, and of the Obedience which, as Children, we must yield to him.

Children ought to be entirely guided by their Parents whilst they are Young, and incapable of judging and acting for themselves.

When they grow up to Manhood, tho Love and Honour remain even then indispensable Duties, yet the paternal Authority is not so great as it was. But, with relation to God, we are ever Young, & in a State of Minority, and therefore, at all times, the Disposition of Children is required of us towards God. Again,

As God is our Father, a willing Compliance, and a chearful Obedience are due to him from us.

Fatherly Dominion, as it is the most ancient and natural, so it is certainly the most gentle of all Governments; and Parents are usually apt to err on the side of Indulgence, rather than of Severity.

God is a Father to us, in every Sense of the Word, bestowing upon us more than we could hope or expect, forgiving us our Offences, ruling us with Lenity, making Allowances for human Infirmities, Temptations, Surprizes, Mistakes, and Errors, every thing, indeed, that can claim Compassion. — Thus the Scriptures speak of him; and, condescending to our Apprehensions, clothe him with paternal Kindness, or weakness; — Which shall we call it?

They represent him loath to correct, & distressed to do it; — “How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee O Israel? — mine Heart is turned within me, my Repeatings are kindled together;” — soon relenting, appeased, and disarmed upon the first Tokens of a sincere Repentance. (Ezekiel xviii. 21 - 23.) Again,

The Consideration that God is our Father, sh’d lead us to imitate and resemble him.

It should raise in us a just Regard for, and high Valuation of ourselves, and excite the utmost Degree of innocent Pride in us, and Honesty of Ambition; — It should inspire noble Thoughts, and produce in us generous Inclinations; — It sh’d withdraw us from every thing mean, base, & polluting, from all unworthy Designs and Actions, and excite us to Undertakings suitable to the Dignity of our Nature
and

and the exceeding high Nobility of our Descent. It should cause that we do nothing ignoble, but every thing worthy of such an eminent and high Relation, and as shall answer the Credit of such our Extraction. Having God for our Father, there sh'd be nothing in us to debase the Honour of his excellent Greatness.

The Relation of Father and Son supposeth some Likeness; And the Son, who values and respects his Father, will be ashamed to degenerate, but will strenuously endeavour equally to inherit his Virtues, as his Name and Fortune, and to be the fair Transcript of the perfect Original. "If ye were Abraham's Children," (says our Lord to the Jews,) "ye would do the Works of Abraham." So, - "If we be the Sons of God, we must," (as St. Paul exhorts,) "imitate God, as dear Children."

The Scriptures frequently remind us of this Duty both in general, and also in particulars.

God is holy and pure, so ought we to be. "As he who hath called us is holy, so should we also be holy in all manner of Conversation, that we may be the Sons of God."

God is good; - In this we should resemble him: "Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect."

God is bountiful, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering

suffering; thence also should we learn to be kind to All, even to our Enemies, "that we may be the Children of our Father, who is in Heaven."

Our own Reason, indeed, will tell us, that long Depravity of Heart, and habitual Wickedness must destroy, in a great measure, this Relation between God and us.

If sensual Objects engross all our thoughts and time, if our "better part" be sunk in sensual Pleasures, how can we be the Children of him who is pure and spiritual? If we be fierce and contentious, malicious and unrelenting, cruel and uncharitable, in what sense can we belong to Him who is essential Love? And over-flowing Benevolence?

Can he acknowledge us for his, when sin hath defaced the fair Image, and not one Token remains by which he can know us?

Let us, therefore, forever guard against Sin, which is of so dire a Consequence, as to exclude us from any Relationship to God, and from all the beneficial Effects flowing from it; & aim at all and every Virtue, as being that alone which can manifest our spiritual Sonship and Adoption, and render us "meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of God's Sons in Light." But further,

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The Consideration that God is our Father, teaches us the great Duties of a thorough Trust in God, & Confidence in Prayer towards him. We call this a Duty, and so it is, yet ought it rather to be considered as our Privilege, and as an exceeding great Favour, to be permitted to cast all our Burthen & Care upon God, to rely on his Providence, and to be solicitous about nothing that concerns our Sustainance.

Children, especially such as have wealthy and kind Parents, live altogether at ease, and free from every care concerning their Maintenance; void of all Doubt, and void of all Distrust.

Such, therefore, ought to be the State of our Minds, since we have a Father so good and great, as, (notwithstanding large as his family is,) to be able to "open his Hand, and fill all things living with Plentiuosness."

"What man is there, who, if his Son ask bread, will give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will for a Fish, give him a Serpent?" "If we then, who are evil, know how to give good Gifts to our Children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?"

Thus, our Saviour, (with a convincing force of Argument,) excites us to draw near to our Father;

nor with the adject Fear and extorted Submission of Slaves ; nor with the diffident Shiness of Strangers ; nor with the Doubts & Suspicions of half-reconciled Enemies ; but with a true filial Temper, with respectful love, and a modest & humble Confidence.

But further, To this Hope and Reliance is to be added Contentment and Resignation ; Contentment in a low or inconvenient, and Resignation in a suffering State.

To our Father and Master it belongs, of right, to order his own Family according to his own Discretion, to assign a proper Station, and to allot a proper Portion severally to each ; &, much better it is for us that He should exercise this Authority, than that We should serve ourselves ; since the worst of God's Disposings, (if any thing in the Divine OEconomy can be so termed,) is better than the best of Man's Orderings.

Thus, as we learn Contentment from the Parental Character of the Almighty, in the several Stations of Life ; so also do we, Resignation under all his Corrections. It is this that sweetens all our Afflictions to us, as knowing, that "if we endure Chastening, God dealeth with us as with Sons ; for, what Son is there whom the Father chasteneth not ? Now, they

they do it for their Pleasure, but He for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness.

These things are written in Holy Scripture for our Comfort and Instruction, that we should patiently and with Thanksgiving, bear our Heavenly Father's Correction, whensoever, by any manner of Adversity it shall please his gracious Goodness to visit us."

Lastly, If God be the Father of all Beings, then are they all, in some sort, related to us, and so may claim from us an Affection and Regard, according to their respective Natures, Dispositions, Capacities, Behaviour and Deserts.

As we are all Members of One great Family, we are, therefore, obliged to universal Benevolence, exercising Mercy & Bounty towards all our Fellow Creatures, (as far as we can,) "that we may," in this Sense, "be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven: for, he maketh his Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good; and sendeth Rain on the Just and on the Unjust."

Even the very least of God's Creatures is not to be oppressed, nor misused by us; since even that, with us, is the Work of God's hands, the Subject of his Care, and the Object of his Providence.

To further this Consideration, it is observable,
Serm. XVII. that

that we are taught by our Saviour when we pray, to say "our," not my "Father," to remind us of our Brethren, as well as of God, who is our Father. God is the Common-Parent of all Mankind: There is therefore, inexpressible Force in that Argument, "Have we not all One Father, hath not One God created us? why do we deal treacherously," or in any respect unjustly or unkindly, "every man against his Brother?" (A) & yet with greater Force still doth it hold, to prevent mutual Injuries or Unkindness among Christians, who being in a much closer, and more endearing Sense, Children of God, & Brethren one to another, than the rest of the World, surely ought never to be, what they are too often, remarkably, deficient in that reciprocal Affection, which was intended as the Token whereby "all men should know them?" He, therefore, who loveth not his Brother whom He hath seen, how can he love God, his Father, whom he hath not seen?

Respectful Thoughts are due from us to the holy Angels, who are sent forth to minister to us, though unseen, and to do us good Offices.

(A) ——— "Equal Lot
May join us, equal Joy, as equal Love."

Serm. XVII.

A grateful Remembrance is due to those excellent Persons departed hence, whose examples excite to Emulation, and with whom we hope to converse hereafter.

Benevolence is due to all Mankind, "especially to those who are of the Household of Faith," in Conformity to the Example of our heavenly Father, "who is good, and does good," especially to those who are faithful and obedient to him. (A)

In a Word, this should cherish our Faith, raise our Hope, & quicken our Devotions, so as to address ourselves to him with Dispositions of hearts, becoming Children, who have no where such a Father, as "our Father which is in Heaven;" making him acquainted with all our Wants, coming to him for Advice in all our Straits, trusting him with all our Concerns, readily obeying all his Commands, being pleased and contented with all & any of his Allotments, bearing his Chastisements with Patience, receiving his Encouragements with Thankfulness, rendering him the utmost of our Love, behaving ourselves orderly and kindly towards all his Children, as fellow-Creatures and Brethren with us in respect to him, who is our common Father, and, in all his imitable

(A) See Vol. 1, page 366. &c.

Serm. XVII.

imitable Perfections, striving to resemble him, being Followers or Imitators of God, as dear Children."

Without such filial Effects as these, and others of like Import, on our Lives, vain will be our Faith in this endearing Attribute of God, our Father; indeed worse, if we treat him as our Enemy, and show ourselves undutiful, and rebellious to him.

Always remembering, then, the Nobleness of our Extraction, & our exalted Descent, may we, (as Sons of the Most-High,) "walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called," and having God for our Father, let us render him every Duty consequent on it, that he may not be "ashamed of us when he shall come in his Glory, with all his holy Angels with him to give Crowns of Glory to all them that love his appearing," by acting consistently in their Station, & as Sons of the Most High God, their Relation.

As to the manner of our walking, we are to be directed by the example of our Father, who is our Father, and in all his imitable

SERMON XVIII.

**God, the first Cause, and last End of
all things.**

Rom. xi. 36. "Of Him, and thro' Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be Glory forever."

The Apostle, having considered God's wonderful Proceedings towards the Jews and Gentiles, to shew that there is no Injustice in them, (how unaccountable soever they may seem to us,) proves that no one hath merited any thing at God's hands, nor is it possible, by any Services we can do, to lay any Obligation upon him; for, every thing that we have, is his free gift to us; and, is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own?

Who hath first given to God? — If any one can truly say that he hath given any thing to Him, it shall be recompensed him again: But,

This is altogether impossible, for we are, at best, Receivers, and consequently Debtors unto him; for, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be Glory for ever."

That

(26) God, the first Cause, & last End of all things)

That God is the first Cause, and efficient, and the ultimate End of all things. A Proposition which was universally acknowledged and professed by the holy Men of old, tho' modern Scepticks, (whose Folly is their Wisdom,) have made it matter of Dispute; who, glorying in their atheistical Tenets, cavil at the prime fundamental Articles of Religion, in hopes, at one Stroke, to fell the whole Superstructure. For,

To what purpose, (say they,) is any one Act of Religion performed, if there be not a God at the Helm, to guide and conduct Affairs? If there be not a God who sees the Conduct of his Servants, in order to reward them accordingly?

This they endeavour to make good; but to their Confusion be it known, "that unto us there is one God (A) who is the Father of all (B); "by whom are all things, and we by Him."

So that from these, and the Words before us we cannot understand less, than that God is the efficient Cause of all things; and, of Course, the final also, to whom all things are to be referred; for, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be Glory for ever."

Not

(A) Sermon XII,

(B) Sermon XVII.

Not only the Dispensation of Grace, but of good things ; not only in the Work of Redemption, but of Creation also is God the Fountain and Original, from whence every good thing proceeds, and the last End to which every thing is to be referred.

In speaking further to these Words, I shall observe the following Order, and shall shew,

I. First, The true Meaning and Import of them :

II. Confirm the Doctrine contained in them ; And,

Lastly, See what Uses and Improvements can be made from them.

First, Of the true Meaning and Import of them.

These Words, as they suggest to us that God is the first Cause of all things, so do they plainly imply, that there was no Cause of him, that he derived not his Being from another, or depends upon him ; for, the Creator must be both before & above the Creature, and therefore must be pre-existent, before all things, was always and eternally of Himself. — Thus much is implied from the necessary Order of the Words before us ; And then,

In direct Terms we infer from them, that there never was any efficient Cause of God, but that as He was of Himself, so He is the Cause of all things

128 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

besides Himself, the Fountain and Original of all created Beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend; or, (to use the Expression of St. John,) "By Him all things were made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made."

So that when we attribute to God, that he is the First, we mean, that there was nothing before Him, and that He was before all things, and that all things are by Him.

But further, not only "Of Him", but also "To Him, are all things."

"All things tend to their Original;" God being the Creator of all things, all things, therefore, must have Recourse unto Him; which they all, some way or other, do, to the Illustration of his Glory, and the Manifestation of his Perfections; the End for which they were made.

The Words, thus explained, naturally lead us, (according to the Order proposed,) to confirm the Doctrine contained in them, which I shall do under the two-fold Advantage of natural Light & divine Revelation. And,

First, By natural Light. — The Notion of God contains in it all possible Perfection. Now,

The

The utmost Perfection we can imagine, is, for a Being to be wholly independent, and the Author of all Blessings, however dispersed; which he can only be, by being always of himself, and before all things, and by being the Cause and Original of them, from whom they are all derived, & on whom they continually depend.

This Notion and Ingredient of the Divine Being struck so forcibly upon the Heathen World, even by the Light of Nature, that it is almost one of the first Principles in their Theology. — So that the Being of all things is to be attributed to God.

That all things are by Him, is not only reasonable, now it is revealed, & authentically discovered; but is what was also discovered by the natural Light of the Heathens themselves.

Hence it was, that they gave to God the Titles of “The first Being, — The first Cause, — and, The first Mover of all things.”

Hence it was, that they called God “the Author and Parent of all things;” “the maker and Architect of the World, and of all Creatures;” “the Fountain and Original of all things.”

But further, God, (from the natural Light of Mankind,) being thus proved to be the Author of all things, is, from thence also, plainly proved to be

130 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

be the End, & Ultimate Object, to which all things are to be referred.

Every wise Agent acts upon Design, and to some End; even in the Creature we see the perfect traces of the first Original, & we are sufficiently provident not to lay-out our Labour for Nothing. — If therefore, in the imperfect Pattern, these things are so truly discernable, in how much greater Amplitude, (suppose ye,) must it shine in that "Fullness of Wisdom," "which made all things for himself?"

The Aim & Design, then, for which God made all things, was, (some way or other,) for the Illustration of his Glory, and the Manifestation of his Perfections. This is the highest End that we can imagine, to which all the Effects of the divine Power, and Goodness, and Wisdom, do refer.

This also was so evident to the very Heathens by the Light of Nature, that they equally acknowledged it with the former Principle. For,

They thought nothing could be a greater Contradiction, than to acknowledge "God to be the Author and Giver of every good and perfect Gift," and yet to deny him the Returns due.

Hence, therefore, it was, that from calling him the First, they reasoned that he was also the Last, and ultimate End of all things, and that all things

moved

moved towards God, as things to their Centre; or as an up-lifted Stone again impends to it's Mother-Earth: "because (say they,) it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their Original, and to return to the great Creator of all things."

When speaking of Nature, (which with them signifies God,) they have these words, which are so very like those of the Apostle, that they may seem to be taken from them: "Of Thee, and to Thee, are all things."

These are the Arguments which the Heathens, without the Assistance of a divine Revelation, gathered, in Proof of the Doctrine before us; and no marvel, that either to the first Proposition they were so exact, or to the second so particular. For,

As to the First, they had the Beauty of the Universe to convince them in it; &, as to the Latter, they had innumerable Instances of Nature to confirm it to them, as well as the Ingenuity of their own Minds.

Every Stream spontaneously ran to it's first great Depth, and every thing on Earth dropped down to that Level out of which it first was raised. And,

These Maxims of their's, (if we had not a diving Revelation further to confirm them to us,) we could by no means disapprove. For,

What Folly is it to impute the World, and this orderly and beautiful Frame of things, to Chance!

232 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

Those things which bear the proper Effects of Counsel, and the evident Impressions of Wisdom upon them! What pitiful Shifts are the Atheists put to to make good their Assertions in the Denial of God & the first Formation of all things! or, rather indeed, which more thoroughly expose them!

Is it not much more reasonable to say that the Wisdom of God made them, and that "all these things are by him;" than to attribute them to an happy fortuitous Concourse of Atoms thus conveniently connected by Chance? But further,

Besides the Light of Nature, we have also the Testimony of Holy Writ to confirm us in it.

Hither belong all those places, where God declares himself to be "the First and the Last:" As, "Before Me there was no God, neither after Me shall there be any." — "I am the first, I also am the last, and besides me there is no God." — "My hand hath laid the Foundation of the Earth, & my right hand spread the Heavens;" thereby implying that he made the World, & was the first Cause of all things.

Again, "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, (saith the Lord,) which is, and which was, and which is to come; the Almighty." But,

More expressly, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we by him." "God made the World, & all things in it." — "He giveth

giveth to all Life, & Breath, & all things." — "By him we live, and move, and have our Being." (A)
 "For, of him, and through him, and to him are all things." Again,

Hither also we may refer those Texts which attribute the same to the Second Person in the adorable Trinity, as being the eternal "Wisdom and Word of God, by whom all things were made." "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." — "God created all things by Jesus Christ." — "By him were all things created that are in the Heavens above, or in the Earth beneath, visible or invisible, whether they be Thrones, or Dominions, Principalities, or Powers; all things were made by him, and for him."

"All things proceed from God: His Power is unbounded, his Wisdom is from Eternity, and his Goodness endureth for ever. — He sitteth on his Throne in the Centre, and the Breath of his Mouth giveth Life to the World. He toucheth the Stars with his Fingers, and they run their Course rejoicing. On the Wings of the Wind he walketh abroad, and performeth his Will thro all the Regions of

(A) Life is otherwise in God, than in the Creatures, in Him originally, in them derivatively; our Life is in Him, but his is in Himself.

Serm. XVIII.

of unlimited Space . Order, and Grace, and Beauty spring from his hand. The Voice of Wisdom speaketh in all his Works, but the human Understanding comprehendeth it not. Justice and Mercy wait before his Throne, Benevolence and Love enlighten his Countenance forever. Who is like unto the Lord in Glory? Who in Power shall contend with him? Hath he any equal in Wisdom? Can any in Goodness be compared unto him? — He it is, O Man! who hath created thee; Thy Station on Earth is fixed by his Appointment: The Powers of our Mind are the Gift of his Goodness; The Wonders of our Frame are the Work of his hand.

Let us, then, hear his Voice, for it is gracious, & he that obeyeth shall establish his Soul in peace."

Which brings me, (by way of Application,)

Thirdly, To onforce the Duty which the Goodness of God, (manifested in the Creation of us, and so many things around us,) requires from us. "To him be Glory for ever."

If God be the first Cause of all things, and the Producer of them, calling them forth into Existence, and hath ever since preserved, and doth govern & dispose of all their Concerns, & orders every thing that befalls them, Then,

Hence

Hence let us learn, with Humility and Thankfulness, to own and acknowledge, to admire and bless God, the Author and Original of our Beings, and as the Spring and Fountain of all the Blessings and good things which we enjoy.

It was upon this Account that Holy David blessed God, in these words.

"Blessed be thou, Lord, God of Israel our Father, for ever and ever. For,

"Thine, O Lord, is the Greatness, & the Power and the Glory, and the Victory, and the Majesty: for all that is in the Heaven, and in the Earth is thine; Thine is the Kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all.

"Both Riches and Honours come of thee, & thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is Power and Might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give Strength unto all.

"Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious Name; for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

Again, "Praise is comely for the Upright; and it becometh well the Just to be thankful."

It is the most honourable of all religious Duties, being the same Service which is paid by the blessed

Saints

36 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

Saints and Angels in Heaven; and, (as God himself declares,) is also most acceptable to him: "Whoso offereth me Praise, he honoureth me."

Did we but consider what these Words import, that "God is the first Cause of all things," we should see exceeding great Reason to acknowledge, to adore, and praise him, & that with the greatest Humility, and most profound Reverence; because we have not given him any thing, but have received all from him.

He is the Cause of all things, who did freely & of his own Good-Will & Pleasure communicate Beings to us, without any Constraint or Necessity, but what his own Goodness laid upon him: "Thou art worthy, therefore, O Lord, to receive Glory and Honour, and Power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy Pleasure they are, and were created."

We could not, before we were, deserve any thing from him; or move him by any Argument, or importune him by any Intreaties, to make us; but he freely gave us our Being, and ever since we depend upon him, and by him have been preserved, and cannot subsist one moment without the continued Influence of the same Power and Goodness which first called us out of nothing.

He is the Author of all the Good, and the Fountain of all those Blessings which for the present we enjoy

enjoy, or for the future hope for.

Let us, therefore, render him back the Glory due, the Tribute of Praise and Thanksgiving; the Tribute of living to his Glory, who made us out of nothing, for his Honour, and our Benefit.

When he made us at first, he designed us for Happiness; and when "we by Transgression fell," and by our Sin and Disobedience, forfeited that Happiness, which he designed us for, he sent no less a Person than his Only-Begotten Son into the World for our Recovery, and gave his Life a Ransom for our Souls: He hath not only admitted us into a new Covenant in which he hath promised Pardon & eternal Life to us, upon the few & easy Conditions only of Faith & Repentance, (which is Amendment and Obedience,) but hath also purchased these Blessings for us, by the most endearing Price, even the Blood of his own Son; & hath saved us in such a manner as may justly astonish us. — "O! that men would, therefore, praise the Lord for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he doeth for the Children of Men; that they would show-forth his Praise with Thanksgiving, and tell-out his Works with Gladness."

Upon these Considerations it is, that we should awaken ourselves to the Praise of God, & "speak-well of him in all places of his Dominion;" and (with

138 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things,

the Holy Psalmist,) call-up our Spirits, & summon all the Faculties and Powers of our Souls to assist us in this Work.

“Bless the Lord, O my Soul, & all that is within me bless his holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his Benefits; who, forgiveth all thy Sins, and healeth all thine Infirmities; who redeemeth thy Life from Destruction, and crowneth thee with tender Mercy and Loving-Kindness.”

“It is he that satisfieth our Souls with good things,” and hath promised eternal Life and Happiness to us, and will, (in the End,) confer and bestow it upon us; “therefore our Souls, and all that is within us, should bless his holy Name.”

This is all the Return we can make him for the Being which he hath given us, for the daily Preservation of it, and for the Blessings and Favours he is continually heaping upon us; 'tis so just a Tribute, that there can be no greater Provocation than to withhold it from him. Indeed,

St. Paul ascribes the Blindness and Ignorance of the Heathen World to this Cause, (viz.) “that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; wherefore God gave them up” to all that Folly and Lewdness, of which the Apostle, (in the following Verses of that Chapter,) gives a full and particular Account,

The

The Jews also, (who were God's own peculiar People, and so highly favoured by him, that he had not dealt so with any other Nation,) were very often as severely punished, and at last delivered over to Destruction for their Unthankfulness.

Let the Goodness of God, therefore, be always in our Thoughts, when we reflect upon the Instances of his Love towards us; how he created, and still preserves us; how he redeemed us from Sin & Misery, and calls us to Repentance, and is ready to forgive us whenever we return to him; how he supplies us with his Grace, to enable us to do our Duty, and hath promised eternal Happiness, as the Reward of our Obedience.

For these things, "not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give we the Praise." For, "thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory and Honour, and Power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy Pleasure they are and were created." But further,

Not only Praise & Thanksgiving, but ardent Love also on this Account becomes us towards him.

It is our Saviour's Argument, "He to whom little is given, loveth little; but, to whomsoever much is imparted, the same loveth much." Now,

If we consider the Blessings of God towards us,
Serm. XVIII. "in

140 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

"in the Creation and Preservation, but more especially in the redemption of Mankind by Jesus Christ, whereby we obtain the Means of Grace, and Hopes of Glory," we shall surely think that the greatest Expressions of our Love towards him, are little enough for his Favours towards us. Now,

What it is to love God, God himself hath expressly declared unto us; "He that loveth me, keepeth my Commandments;" - "In this is our Love to God perfected; in that we do whatsoever he saith unto us." — "He therefore, that saith, I love God, and yet keepeth not his Commandments, is a Liar, and the Truth is not in him." As therefore,

We "shew-forth the Voice of his Praise in Thank-giving;" so let us also manifest the Sincerity of our Love towards him, in all dutiful Obedience, for his Favours to us. But further,

If God be the First Cause of all things, we should Not pride Ourselves, as tho we had received nothing from him. The constant rising of the Sun, the Descent of fruitful Showers, the Return of temperate Seasons, with Seed-Time and Harvest, the Continuance of our Life, the Enjoyment of Health, and competent Means of a Livelihood, the reputed Favours of Fortune, the daily Protection from incident Dangers, the Helps of improving Knowledge, ob-
taining

taining Virtue, becoming happy, & such like most excellent Gifts, are all from the Lord; — "Where then is the Cause of Boasting? It is excluded: for God is both the Author, as well as Giver of every good & perfect Gift." "Let not the wise Man, then, glorie in his Wisdom, nor the strong Man in his Strength, nor the rich Man in his Riches; but, let him that glorieth, glorie in the Lord;" "Who both made us, and gives us all things richly to enjoy." But further,

If God be the first Cause of all things, and by his Providence orders & disposes all our Concerns, this should teach us with Patience and Resignation to submit to all Events, and to whatever Afflictions may befall us, as being all of them ordered by his wise Disposal for our Good.

There are many excellent Considerations besides this, which should make us submit duly to whatever befalls us; and which we are but too apt to overlook; and in our Hearts regard only the immediate Agents, which are but the Second Causes of the things before us; not considering that all their Motions are directly subordinate to the First, and that all the Actions of God's Creatures are under his wise Controul; so that nothing can happen to us

242 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

without the Direction, or at least Permission of God.

This one Consideration, therefore, is sufficient of itself to silence every Murmur and Discontent that may rise in our Breasts against any of the Dispensations of Providence towards us. Accordingly,

We find that holy Men, in Scripture, made excellent Use of this, to argue themselves into Patience & Resignation, with Content, in every Condition.

So Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

So Job, (who did not consider the immediate Occasions of all his Afflictions to him; but looks up to God, the great Governor and Disposer of all these Events;) "the Lord gave, & the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord."

So our Blessed Saviour, when He was ready to suffer, did not consider the Malice of his Enemies, which was the immediate Cause of his Sufferings, but looks up to a higher End, even to "God, who ruleth over all." "The Cup which my FATHER hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

He that looks upon all things as coming from second Causes, & in his Heart regards not the first, "the good, the great, and wise Governor," will be apt to take Offence at every cross and unwelcome
goodnw Accident

Accident that befalls him. (A) When

(A) A devout Regard to the Hand of God, in the various Events of Life, tends greatly to promote good Dispositions and Affections in Men.

It will be found by those who attend to the Workings of human Nature, that a great Proportion of those malignant Passions which break-out in the Intercourse of Men, arises from confining their Attention wholly to Second Causes, and over-looking the First Cause of all. Hence they are insolent in Prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own Abilities; and in Adversity they are querulous, and unforgiving, because they have no Object on which to fix their View, but the Conduct of Men only, who have acted as their Enemies. They behold no Plan of Wisdom or Goodness carried on throughout Nature, which can allay the Discomposure of their Mind. As soon as their Temper is ruffled, the World appears to them no other than a continued Scene of Disasters and Injuries, of confused Events, and of unreasonable Men. Whereas,

To the pious Man, the Contemplation of the Universe exhibits a very different Prospect. In the midst of seeming Confusion, He traces a Principle of Order; & by attending to that Order, his Mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governour presiding over all the Commotions which are raised by the Tumult of conflicting Passions and Interests; guiding, with imperceptible Influence, the hand of the Violent to benevolent Purposes; accomplishing unexpected Ends by the most improbable Means; oblidging the Wrath of Man to praise him; sometimes exalting the low, often snaring the wicked in their own Devices.

Respectful Acknowledgement of this divine Government, controules the Disorders of inferior Passions. Reverence for the Decrees of Heaven, inspires Patience and Moderation. Trust in that perfect Wisdom and Goodness which directs all for the best, diminishes the Shock which worldly Disasters occasion. The Irritation of Passion & Resentment will always bear Proportion to the Agitation which we suffer from the Changes of Fortune,

144 God, the first Cause, & last End of all things.

When we look upon Evils as coming only from Men "of like Passions with ourselves," we are apt to be impatient, and to say, "Who made thee a Ruler and a Judge over us," — a Dispenser of these things to us?

We should, therefore, look upon all things as under the Government & Disposal of the First Cause, and the Circumstances of every Condition, as allotted to us by the wise Providence of our Maker.

This Consideration, that it is His Hand, and that He hath done it, would allay all the Murmurings of our Hearts, whenever they attempt to rebel against him. If we would but represent God as present to all Actions, and governing & disposing all Events, this would silence and appease our Spirits when they are ready to riot and mutiny against any of God's Dispensations.

These are some of the Uses which we are to make from the Consideration of God's being the First Cause of all things: But,

Lastly

He who connects himself with nothing but Second Causes, partakes of the Violence and Irregularity of all the inferior Movements belonging to this great Machine. Whereas, the Man who refers all to God, dwells, (if we may so speak,) in that higher Sphere where Motion begins: He is subject to fewer Shocks and Concussions, and is only carried along by the Motion of the Universe.

Lastly, If God be the Last End also, then let us so regard him, as to refer all our Actions to his Glory; this is due unto him; for, as he is the First Cause, therefore, doth he most reasonably require it from us. And

Herein likewise the Scriptures are express, frequently & strongly reminding us of this End, calling upon us to propose it to ourselves as our ultimate Design. "Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do all to the Glory of God." "We are to glorify him in our Souls, and in our Bodies, which are his." — He is the Author of all the Faculties and Powers that we have, and therefore we should render him back the Glory due, by using them all to his Honour and Service. (1) We do all by Him, & therefore should do all to Him; for "of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. — To whom be Glory forever."

(A) *Deum Dei, et Deo.*

Hic omne Principium, Hic refer Exitum.

To Him your first Designs commend;

To Him refer your purposed End.

Initium actuum, et Finem facite Deum.

SERMON XIX.

Of the supreme Majesty
and
Dominion of God.

Rom. ix. 5. "Who is over all."

God being the First Cause of all things (A) must,
(of Course,) have the Dominion over them.

"Who is over all."

These words, as they are immediately spoken of
the Person of Christ, the Son of God, are, and must
be equally applicable to God, "of whom," (as to
his divine Nature,) "Christ came; who is over all,
God, blessed for ever."

We all live under the benign Government, and
are all subject to the Dominion of the God of
Heaven. The Divine Being superintends the whole
universal System, &c governs the Natural, as well as
the Moral World. — All Creatures are subject

to

(A) Sermon XVIII.

to his Power and Rule; But, When his Reign, his Dominion, and Kingdom are spoken of, we are primarily, if not peculiarly to understand his Government of moral Agents and rational Subjects. As these are his noblest Productions, and stand above the rest of the Creation, they must needs be the principal Objects of his Care and Providence.

To direct mere Matter, to produce out of it, so much Beauty and Variety, so much Symetry and Proportion, requires doubtless great Power & Wisdom; but to preside over the intellectual System, to rule not only the Children of Men and the Kingdoms of the Earth; but Angles, and Authorities, & heavenly Powers; - such an Administration as this, is Divine in the highest Sense; & such a Kingdom is most worthy of him, whose Power is boundless, & Understanding infinite; and "who," upon these Accounts, "is the only Potentate, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."

The Dominion of God, then, (as it is exercised by his providential Dispensations towards his Creatures, and is the Government of a Being, who is infinitely wise, and just, & good,) is the most comfortable thing we can propose to our Conceptions.

Tho they who represent it as the Dominion of an Almighty

148 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Almighty, Arbitrary Being, who, by mere Will, can make that good or evil, which, (in the common Sentiments of Mankind,) is otherwise, and as one who hath a Right to doom all Mankind to inevitable and eternal Misery, make it the most dreadful thing we can possibly imagine. (A)

It

(A) To form in us a right Temper towards God, and that affectionate, practical Regard to him, which is our principal Duty, we sh'd carefully endeavour to have just Notions concerning his Government, (that, we mean, which is most strictly and properly so called,) over rational and moral Agents.

The sole Foundation of it cannot be the natural Attribute of Power, for that alone can never produce a willing and reasonable Obedience, which the Voice of our own Reason will pronounce to be only truly good and acceptable to God.

The human Mind is so constituted, as necessarily to discern the Difference between moral Good and Evil, and directed to form it's Conduct by a regard to that Difference; otherwise it cannot enjoy inward Tranquility, with Self-Approbation.

If this be the invariable Law of our Nature, the declared Will of any Being, how powerful soever, cannot be the Rule of our Actions, Inconsistently with our original Moral Sentiments, nor indeed any further than it appears agreeable to them.

The true Foundation, therefore, of God's moral Government is, not his absolute Power to dispose of the Creatures as he pleases, but the unchangeable Rectitude and Goodness of his Nature, manifested in that moral human Constitution, of which he is the Author.

Indeed, The divine moral Government, as the Obligation it lays upon us cannot be satisfied otherwise than by an intelligent & affectionate Obedience, so every part of it's Exercise carries the clearest Evidence of Wisdom, Equity and Goodness, the stable Foundations of Authority which Reason cannot resist.

This

It may, therefore, conduce to many good Purposes to state this Attribute in its proper light, that we may have such Apprehensions of it as truly render it just Ground of Comfort and Satisfaction, and not of Dread and Horror to us; and this I shall do by saying before you,

First, the true & proper Import of the Doctrine before us, according to the best Divines. And then,

Secondly, confirm it, in it's absolute Acceptation, from the best Authorities.

Concluding with such Inferences as shall reasonably flow from the same: And,

First, The Government of God is, (as to Power,) absolute and uncontrollable; no Power from any where

This is the best and most becoming Sentiment we can have of God's moral Government. It is founded on his sovereign irresistible Power & natural Dominion, but on his absolute, perfect Purity, Wisdom and Goodness. The End of it is the most absolute universal Good and Happiness of the rational Creation. It's Laws are perfect Truth & Righteousness; which every proper subject, (i.e.) every intelligent Creature may see, and by it be induced to yield a reasonable and willing Obedience, which alone is real Religion, & only pleasing to him. His Power in the Administration of his Government, is exercised, not arbitrarily, but according to the most perfect Equity; and Rewards & Punishments are distributed in exact Proportion to the Measure of moral Good and Evil, in the Dispensations and Actions of every particular moral Agent.

Serm. XIX.

And, as we may see (A)

250 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

where derived, or however combined, being able to hinder him, who being Almighty, doeth according to his Will, in the Admiration of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth." "My Counsel shall stand, and I will do all my Pleasure."

God is by Nature King over All; and his Kingdom is the Universe. But because the True Greatness & Dignity of a Governour consists chiefly in the Obedience of them that can disobey; Because it is more excellent to be obeyed by Reason and Understanding, by Will and Choice, than by mere Necessity of Nature: Because it is more noble to govern Free Agents by moral Considerations, by the Knowledge of what is intrinsically Good or Evil, by a Sense of the Excellency of Truth and Virtue, by the Wisdom of reasonable and useful Laws, & by the Views of proper Rewards and Punishments, than to have Power over infinite Systems of inanimate Matter, which has no Sense of the Regularity of its own Motions, nor Capacity to perceive the Wisdom & Glory of its Creator: Therefore the Dominion of God principally consists, in his Government of Reasonable and Intelligent Creatures; in his being served and obeyed by those, who at the same Time are capable of glorifying in him.

But, O LORD, how LOVER OF SOULS.

This

(A) See Wisdom 12, 13, &c.

252
This we may even learn from our earthly Govern-
ors; for, though they may have Ability sufficient
to protect us, & great Wisdom to discern what is for
the Good of their Subjects; Yet, if they be defi-
cient in Justice, Goodness, or Compassion for them,
their Power and Wisdom may be exercised in the
worst of Tyrannies, as only rendering them able to
do Mischief according to the utmost of their Skill.

But, None of these things happen to God; for,
He is regulated according to the Fulness of his Na-
ture, invariably, and in no way contradicts himself;
being Holy, Just, and Good; as well as Wise and
Great.

As to the Sovereignty and Dominion of God,
therefore, we say, Negatively,

That it doth not consist in a Right to gratify and
delight himself in the extreme Misery and Punish-
ment of innocent and undeserving Creatures; for a
just God can never challenge more than an equal
Right. And,

Because some have been very apt to entertain
such groundless Jealousies, and unworthy Thoughts
of God, He hath therefore given us his Oath to as-
sure us of the contrary: "As I live, (saith the Lord,)
I have no pleasure in the Death of a Sinner, but ra-
ther that he should turn from his Wickedness & live."

Serm. XIX.

Indeed

pable of disobeying him, who by their own Act set forth his Glory, and not merely in their being acted upon by Him; who in their several Stations & Degrees, according to the Light that is afforded them, discern what is Right, and approve what is Good, and act by their Free Power, and are conscious of the Excellency of Virtue, & love him whom they obey, and are made happy by the Participation of his Perfections.

This is that, in which principally consists the Dominion of God, a Kingdom, in which shines forth the Goodness, & Justice, & Wisdom, & Holiness, of the Supreme Governour, as clearly as his Power and Dominion does in his ruling the whole material Universe.

It is the Dominion of that God, who is infinite in all Perfections, and, - &c. - (under)

all Perfections, and consequently in Wisdom and Justice, in Holiness, Truth, & Goodness, as well as in Power and Omnipotence. (A)

These being all immediate Emanations from the same simple and invariable Essence, he cannot exert any of them so, as to thwart and contradict each other.

He, therefore, cannot exercise any such Sovereignty over his Creatures, (whilst they continue capable of his Grace and Goodness,) as is repugnant to it and to his Mercy and Compassion to the Souls that he hath made.

True and excellent are those Words of the Book of Wisdom, "Thou hast Mercy on all, for thou canst do all things, & winkst at the Sins of men, because they should amend; for thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing that thou hast made; for, never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it, but thou sparest all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou Lover of Souls."

This (A) See Wisdom 12, 13, &c.

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ors; for, though they may have Ability sufficient
to protect us, & great Wisdom to discern what is for
the Good of their Subjects; Yet, if they be defici-
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- Sermon. XIX. Indeed

252 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Indeed, so far is God from taking pleasure in Mi-
sery and Destruction, that In Case of Sin & Provo-
cation, He would rather that we would avert his Jus-
tice by Repentance and Amendment.

God, who is good and gracious to all, cannot be
glorified, or pleased in doing hurt to any, where
Justice doth not require it.

Nothing is further from infinite Goodness than
to rejoice in Evil. Again,

The Sovereignty of God doth not consist in impos-
ing Laws upon his Creatures which are either im-
possible to be understood, or observ'd by them : For,

This would not only be contrary to the Dignity
of the Divine Nature, which, in reason, cannot
oblidge, by any Power, to Impossibilities. ^(A) Again,

The Dominion of God doth not consist in a Liber-
ty to tempt men to Evil, or by any inevitable De-
cree to necessitate them to sin, & then punish them
for it; for,

As this would be contrary to the Holiness & Jus-
tice and Goodness of God, so likewise would it be
to the Nature of a reasonable Creature, who cannot
be guilty, or deserve Punishment for what they can-
not help; - And also to the Nature of Virue and
Vice, which cannot consist with Force & Constraint;
And therefore, we say, Affirmatively,

That

(A) The Thing that God requires is the free Consent of the Will
which, in the Nature of things, is not subject to Compulsion; Obedi-
ence itself being *No* Obedience, where there is no Possibility of having
disobeyed. — The true Greatness and Glory of a Prince reigning in
his Kingdom, is the *Willing* Obedience of his Subjects, not their *Weak-
ness and Incapacity of resisting him*: And in all things relating to Reli-
gion and Morality, it is not the magnifying the Glory and Majesty of
God, to suppose Him acting upon and over-ruling Men's Wills by his
Power, but to suppose Them, (like reasonable Creatures,) *choosing* to ob-
ey his Commands by their *Wills*, and *having* the Practice of Virtue and
Goodness. God, by his Power, cannot all Times subdue all Things
to himself; and by this irresistible Dominion, the whole material and
intelligent World is perpetually governed, & where it *resists*, with-
out any Possibility of *disobeying*. But, It is the Will of God, that In-
telligent & Rational Creatures should not obey His Will, but by their
own should not obey by *Force of Nature*, but by the *free Choice* and

That God, by Virtue of his absolute Dominion, hath an unquestionable Right to dispose of all our temporal Concerns, and even our Life itself according to his Will; because, in so doing, He only disposeth of that which he himself had only given during pleasure.

He also hath a Right, for the same reason, to command us to regulate our Desires in the Pursuit of earthly things, & moderate our Appetites in the Use of them; to be liberal in our Distribution, according to the Rules of Charity, prescribed by his Wisdom; and even to deny ourselves in the Enjoyments of them, and freely to part with them, when he requires it; for, what he freely gives, he may give with what Restrictions, to what Ends and Uses, and for what Time he shall, (in his wisdom,) think fit. In a word,

The Sovereignty and Dominion of God consists in a Right to dispose of, and deal with his Creatures in any way that doth not contradict his essential Perfections, nor our natural Conditions.

As to the Dispensations of Grace, allotted to men in this life, and of Rewards and Punishments in the other, the Arbitrariness of his Power is, in no way, concerned in it; he being under Promise & Compact to dispense and measure them out to men, according

252 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God.

Indeed, so far is God from taking pleasure in Misery and Destruction, that In Case of Sin & Provocation, He would rather that we would avert his Justice by Repentance and Amendment.

God, who is good and gracious to all, cannot be glorified, or pleased in doing hurt to any, where Justice doth not require it.

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The Dominion of God doth not consist in a Liberty to tempt men to Evil, or by any inevitable De-

Compliance of the Will. — The material Universe, the whole Frame of Nature is subject to the Power of God, but reasonable Creatures only are subject to his Laws. By this they become accountable, & capable of being judged: By this they are rendered either acceptable to him, and capable of his Reward; or obnoxious, and liable to be punished. This Trial, This Probation he puts upon them suitable to their rational Nature. But this is the Perfection of their Nature, and the highest Improvement of their Virtue, to *choose* to obey him *cheerfully & readily*. The more excellent the Nature, and the more perfect the Virtue of any reasonable Creature is, the more does it delight in obeying the most perfect Will of God, who is Perfection and Goodness itself.

Obsequiousness of the Will. — The more excellent the Nature, and the more perfect the Virtue of any reasonable Creature is, the more does it delight in obeying the most perfect Will of God, who is Perfection and Goodness itself.

3. That God, by Virtue of his absolute Dominion, hath an unquestionable Right to dispose of all our temporal Concerns, and even our Life itself according to his Will; because, in so doing, He only disposeth of that which he himself had only given during pleasure.

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154 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

to the Earnestness of their Requests in seeking it, & their Care in improving the means for it.

However arbitrarily, therefore, God may dispense to men their Endowments and Enjoyments in this Life, (being under the Confinement of no Promise in it,) yet Grace and Salvation he hath obliged himself to dispense legally.

In expecting any thing of this, therefore, from him, we must have recourse, not to any arbitrary Power, or fancied, secret Decrees; but only to his revealed Promises, and covenanted Declarations; to which, as God will stand, so, by it we must stand or fall for ever.

Which, surely, is a Doctrine no less comfortable, than true, being agreeable to the Goodness of the Divine Nature, for Encouragement of human Endeavours, under a paternal, not tyrannical Government.

Such is the Nature of the Sovereignty of God, exercising an Empire and Dominion over his Creatures most independent and infinite; resulting from the Effects of that Goodness, and Power, and Wisdom, whereby all things are, and were made; in no way depending upon any superior; nor is he subject, or accountable for what he does to any of his Creatures.

It is absolute, because all the creatures receive what they have from God, and all depend upon his Goodness, and therefore they owe all possible Duty and perpetual Subjection, so long as they continue in Being, because it is solely by his Power & Goodness that they continue so to be. But,

II. I am to prove it. This Kingdom of God, his Government of the moral World being thus explained, let us inquire how it appears to the Reason of our Minds.

The Question, then, is, (if it can be called so) whether God's intelligent Creatures be under his Care, Protection and Government; or whether they are wholly left to their own Management, & given up to their own Guidance?

If they be left to themselves, and the Government of the World be refused by the Maker of it, no other account can possibly be given of the thing, but that either he wanted Power or Inclination, either was unable to execute this great Charge, or not willing.

That God neither did, nor could want Power to govern the World, is manifest even to Demonstration. For, not to mention that Omnipotence is an essential Attribute of the Divine Nature, most cer-

146 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

tain it is, that He who was able to create the World, must much more be able to direct and govern it: Creation implying and requiring the highest of all Power. He who could raise the Universe from Nothing, and fix it originally in the most exact Order, cannot fail of full Power to preserve & regulate it.

"He that planted the Ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the Eye, shall he not see?" Can any thing escape his Perception who inhabiteth Eternity and Infinity? who vitally exists every where, & cannot be absent any where? As nothing is unknown to him, so nothing is impossible with him; Nothing can resist his Will, or make the least Opposition to his Decrees, Omnipotence knows no Difficulties, but with the greatest Ease accomplishes whatever it pleases, and subdueth all things to itself.

The whole Creation is full of this Truth, & every Object we meet with, proclaims the incomprehensible Power and Majesty of him that made it.

Since then, it cannot be supposed, without the greatest Contradiction to his Nature, that God sh'd be unable to govern the World, we are next to consider, whether he can be supposed unwilling.

And, the Resolution of this Point will readily be found. For, whatever is most agreeable to perfect Wisdom and Goodness must, in this case, be Fact.

And

And, most infallibly God is ever willing to determine and do what is wisest and best : and such is the Superintendence of God, and his Government of all things.

Can any man think it agreeable to perfect Wisdom, that God should be regardless of these things ? that He should make the World and then forsake it ? that he should furnish and fit it up in the noblest Manner, and replenish it with an endless Variety of Inhabitants ? that he should produce innumerable Orders of Beings and Ranks of Creatures ; many of them formed after his own Image, and qualified for the Knowledge and Imitation of himself ; and when he had so done, should relinquish the whole, & give every thing up to Chance and Confusion ? How can such a Conduct as this be ascribed to any wise Agent ? and much less to infinite Wisdom ? But,

Perhaps, it may be urged that the World was first framed in such wonderful Order and Perfection, as to stand in no further Need of the Creator's Superintendence ; and that his rational Creatures were made capable of guiding themselves, and governing those beneath them ; and that by this means, the Order of the World might be maintained without the Divine Interposition.

158 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

The Answer to which, is, that every part of this Pretence is groundless.

It is demonstrable that the very material World cannot be kept in Order by second Causes alone, but continually stands in need of the Creator's Influence, (this might be shown at large,) & much less could the Order and Harmony of the intellectual World be maintained without the divine Administration.

It is true, Men are endued with Reason, and Angels with more; but yet, both Men and Angels being endued also with Liberty, and imperfect, might act against the Light of their own Minds, & so fall into Disorder; & accordingly have actually so done.

On which Account, were it not for God's Providence and Government, it is evident that the moral World, as well as the natural, would become again a mere Chaos, and fall into inextricable Confusion.

Is it not necessary for publick Security, that evil Men, and evil Angels be curbed and restrained? Is it not necessary that Innocence be protected, & Virtue encouraged? that Guilt be exposed and prosecuted, and Vice and Villany checked & punished?

Now, how should any thing of this be effectually done, if God did not sit at the Helm, direct all his Affairs, and dispose of all Events, according to the Rules of Righteousness and Truth. But,

In

In order to discover the Weakness of this Plea, we need only take-notice how it would hold in any human Establishment.

Is any thing to be done without Rulers & Governors? and supposing a Set of Laws, (even the very best,) already made, will they execute themselves? It is true, Men have Reason to direct them, & Laws of various kinds, but 'tis likewise as true, that many Men have wild Humours, fierce Desires, & furious Passions, which frequently prompt them to act in Defiance both of Law and Reason. On which Account, and for the Enforcement of, and Support of both, an executive Power is, and ever will be necessary, absolutely, in all States and Communities.

And, must not this Observation hold much more justly in respect of the whole Creation?

If the several Societies among Men require Rulers and Governors, and cannot subsist without them; what can we think of the Universe itself? must not the whole stand in greater Need than any Part? Most certain, therefore, it is, that the All-wise Creator would never produce such a great and glorious System, and then leave it in a State of Anarchy; this being utterly inconsistent with all the Rules of Wisdom, that we are capable of discovering. Nor,

Serm. XIX.

La

160 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God.

Is it less repugnant to his Righteousness and Goodness. As perfectly good, he must purpose the Welfare of his Creatures; and, in order to it, he w'd not fail to direct and govern them. For, (as we have already seen,) if he had left them to themselves, they could neither expect Happiness, Security, nor Quiet. Again,

His Guidance and Government of the World, clearly follows from the Rectitude of his Nature. It is impossible that he should be ignorant of the Behaviour of his Creatures. He must at all times see whether they do well or ill, and as a righteous Judge cannot fail to judge them accordingly.

If God did not govern the World, no sufficient Distinction could be maintained between Virtue & Vice; in many cases, indeed, it would happen that the latter might prosper more than the former: which is what a righteous God cannot finally suffer. He may suffer it for a Season, as in fact we find that he actually does; insomuch, that his Government of the World has sometimes been called in question on this very account; but certainly without just Grounds.

The irregular Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life is, indeed, a clear Proof of a future state, wherein every thing will be rightly adjusted; But, it proves nothing at all against the Doctrine we are now considering.

As

As sure as God is righteous and holy, Vice will suffer, and Virtue prevail and prosper in due time. But no reason can be shewn why the present Time should be the best: so far from it, that good Reasons may be given for the contrary. However, since it must be done sooner or later, either in this Life or the next; since it necessarily follows, from the Perfections of the Divine Nature, that the righteous and godly should be protected & encouraged, and that the wicked sh'd be punish'd; & since moreover, this can only be done by the Searcher of Hearts, the Consequence must be, that the World is governed by him. Upon the whole,

To acknowledge a Deity, & yet to suppose that he is unconcerned either in the Creation or Government of the World, is disowning him in Reality.

In like manner, to confess that God made the World and all things in it, and at the same time deny his Care and Providence over it, is, in effect, to maintain a God, and to destroy his Attributes: It is to maintain inconsistent Opinions, separating things essentially united.

Strictly speaking, the Creation necessarily requires the continued Influence and Support of it's Creator.

This does in no way argue any Defect in the
Sermon, XIX. Work.

162 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Workmanship, because an independent System of Creatures, is not only absurd, but utterly impossible.

God, then, superintends the whole, & governs the natural, as well as the moral World. All Creatures are subject to his Power and Rule. "He remaineth a King forever."

Should we go-on to inquire here, how he governs it, and presume to search into the Methods and Measures of divine Providence, we may easily lose ourselves in a Speculation too high for us.

We have all the Reason in the World to assure ourselves that God's Government is most perfect, in all respects; but to account for the Direction and Disposal of particular Events, & to discover how far they come under, and coincide with general Laws, seem Undertakings far above our present Faculties.

We do not so much as know, with any certainty, whether there is any just Ground for distinguishing, (as we ordinarily do,) between a general and a particular Providence.

All particular Events, (for aught we know,) may be superintended by general Laws.

We might explain and confirm this Observation by various Instances and Suppositions; but I shall only mention the following one, at present; a Supposition

position not only very ancient, but natural; and therefore, both more easy to be conceived, as well as more apt to be entertained; [viz] that the Particularities of human Life may be specially provided for by a Delegation of Power and Authority to subordinate Agents; by whose invisible Intervention, Events may be directed agreeably to the Will and Wisdom of the Supreme Governor: and that, perhaps, in perfect Consistence with the stated Laws of the natural World.

What Absurdity, what Impropriety can there be, in supposing such a Provision as this, for the Tuition and Government of Mankind? Can we think it any Derogation from the Honour and Majesty of the supreme Ruler, to invest certain Beings of exalted Powers and Perfection, with the Administration of his Providential Decrees; they presiding over the several parts of the Universe; while he himself, who alone is capable of it, informs & directs the whole?

This seems perfectly conformable to that Subordination & Scale of Beings, which prevail throughout all Nature, as far as our Faculties are able to reach. Could we see further, we might probably find every System, every habitable Globe, under Government of Vicegerents; and perhaps, the various Districts and Provinces of each, divided amongst the Host of Heaven, & respectively administered according

ding to the Appointments of unerring Wisdom.

If this be agreeable to Nature & Reason, as must undoubtedly be allowed ; we may safely add , that it is by no means disagreeable to Revelation : so far from it, that we find frequent Intimations of this amazing Scheme of Providence, in it.

There is no reason, therefore, why it may not be supposed a general Law of God's moral Government ; being such a one as in no way interferes, but perfectly consists with his Laws of Nature. (A) But,

Be these things as they may, or by whatever other Arguments the Doctrine before us is to be supported, it is evident , the Notion of God's Sovereignty hath universally obtained in the World.

This is every where acknowledged by the Heavens, that "God is the Lord and Sovereign of the World, and all the Creatures therein." (B)

Hence

(A) As God does not always act immediately, nor exert a supernatural Power in any thing, where an human is sufficient, so he may never put forth his Omnipotence, where an Angelic Power is equal to the Effect to be produced . Or, (in other words,) - He may never use more Power, or greater Means than are requisite.

"The Angels of God are ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be Heirs of Salvation."

Tho the Doctrine of the Ministry of Angels is evidently clear in the Bible, yet till our souls mingle with the World of Spirits, our best Ideas on the Subject must be confused, and our utmost Strength of Thought fall short of knowing much of their Nature, and the Mode of their Ministration.

Hence PLATO calls him "The Conductor of all Things" : - and TULLY, "Lord of All." And, The Scripture every where attributes this to God, calling him "Lord of All," "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."

"Behold, (saith Moses,) the Heaven, & the Heaven of Heavens is the Lord's thy God :"

And, God himself, (by the Prophet Jeremy,) "Behold, as the Clay is in the Potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, saith the Lord." And the Psalmist, (by way of humble Acknowledgement to God,) saith,

"Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and thy Dominion endureth through-out all Ages;" Whom therefore, St. Paul rightly styles,

"THE KING ETERNAL."

Again, — "Thou, Lord, art higher than all that are in the Earth, — Thou art exalted far above all Gods." "God sitteth in the Heavens over all from the Beginning." Again,

"His Kingdom ruleth over all." And, in the words before us, "Who is over All, God, blessed forever."

The Testimony of our Saviour is remarkable to this purpose, "My Father is greater than All."

"Our Lord, then, is a great God, & a great King

Serm. XIX.

above

164 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God.

ding to the Appointments of unerring Wisdom.

If this be agreeable to Nature & Reason, as must undoubtedly be allowed; we may safely add, that it is by no means disagreeable to Revelation: so far from it, that we find frequent Intimations of this amazing Scheme of Providence, in it.

There is no reason, therefore, why it may not be supposed a general Law of God's moral Government; being such a one as in no way interferes, but perfectly consists with his Laws of Nature. (A) But,

Be these things as they may, or by whatever other Arguments the Doctrine before us is to be supported, it is evident, the Notion of God's Sovereignty hath universally obtained in the World.

This is every where acknowledged by the Heathens, that "God is the Lord and Sovereign of the World, and all the Creatures therein." (B)

Hence

(A) As God does not always act immediately, nor exert a supernatural Power in any thing, where an human is sufficient, so he may never put forth his Omnipotence, where an Angelic Power is equal to the Effect to be produced. Or, (in other words.) He may use

(B) *Et Pater omnipotens rerum cui summa Potestas.*

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256 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

above all Gods." "God over all, blessed forever."

"He remaineth a King forever."

To these, and other Proofs which might here be produced, we may refer all those Doxologies in which Power, and Dominion, and Authority are ascribed to God.

I shall only mention further, that eminent Confession of Nebuchadnezzar, (a great King,) who, when his Understanding came again to him, was forced to acknowledge that "God was the Most High."

"God, then, remaineth a King forever;" "He is a Judge among Gods." — Our Church, therefore, in her Song of Praise, (the "Te Deum,") styles God, "The Father of an infinite Majesty;" & Christ his Son, (who is co-equal with the Father in the Divine Essence, "The King of Glory." And,

In the Introduction of her Prayer for the King's most excellent Majesty, where, (as in all other places,) she admirably suits herself according to the Subject of her Request, she addresses God, our heavenly Father, under the exalted Characters of "High and Mighty, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; the only Ruler of Princes;" and many other such-like places.

What further remains under this Subject, is, to

see

see what Inferences and Improvements can be made from it. And,

First, Is God the great Sovereign of the World? Then, Dependence on him becomes our Duty; In consequence of which, his Will and Pleasure ought to be the Rule of ours.

St. James has prescribed the respectful Language that Christians ought to use in common Discourse with regard to the divine Sovereignty. "Go to now (saith he,) that is, mark well what I say, "Ye that say to day and to morrow we will go into such a City &c. Whereas, ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we will live, and do this or that." (A) For, this is setting up for independent Beings ourselves, as though we were intirely at our own Disposal, without any regard to the Will and Pleasure of God; whereas, depend upon God we must, whether we will or no: and therefore, it is our Wisdom, as well as Virtue, to do it with Complacency, and turn it into a religious Habit of the Soul. But further,

Is the Dominion and Government of God, (as to Power,) absolute and uncontrollable?

Then,

(A) Socrates reads the same Lesson to his Pupil Alcibiades, telling him, that instead of replying, "I will do so, if You please," his Language should have rather been, "I will do it, if it be the Will of God!"

Serm. XIX.

368 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Then, hence it follows, that none of his Creatures ought, or can have any Right to call him to an Account for any thing that he doeth ; For, "He gives no Account of his Matters to any, nor can any say unto him, what doest thou ?"

The Reason is evident, because all his Works are done in Equity and Truth, & consequently no one can have any Cause to question the Equity or Wisdom of them, or say, (with the Murmurers in Ezekiel,) "The way of the Lord is not equal."

Again, The Dominion of God, (as already explained,) is altogether comfortable & profitable.

First, It is altogether comfortable ; as it assures us that God neither will, nor can do any of his Creatures the least Wrong. For,

If absolute Sovereignty be also absolute Justice, then are we sure that it cannot hurt us ; that he will not, by any his arbitrary Will ; impute That sin unto us, which otherwise would not be ours, and then condemn us for it. Indeed,

Absolute Power being inseparably united to the exactest Justice, is the best and only Security we can have against suffering wrongfully ; for, it will do no Wrong itself, and will rectify every Ill done by inferior Powers ; which none but a sovereign & absolute Power can do.

In

In Confirmation of which, we find that men, when injured and oppressed by others, naturally have Recourse to God, and expect that his Justice should plead their Cause; to him they cry, when lying under Affliction from the hands of men, and trust in him for a Deliverance from the Oppression of their Enemy. But,

Secondly, Absolute Power being also absolute Goodness, will do us all the good we can reasonably expect, even from the best of Beings.

If, with men, it be so great a Comfort to have a Friend, who is eminent for Power and Wisdom, & also rich in Goodness, to resort to in all Straits & Exigencies; — if it be a singular Happiness to any Nation to be governed by a Prince famous for all these Perfections, of how much greater Comfort must it be to live under the Government of One absolute in Power, and infinite in Wisdom, when we know that this Power and Wisdom will certainly be employed in Expressions of Kindness and Goodwill to all who do not absolutely refuse to become fit Objects of his Goodness?

Hence it is natural for all to depend on the divine Goodness, to betake themselves to this great and general Benefactor, for the Supply of all their

Serm. XIX.

Wants,

170 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Wants, to take Refuge in his Ability to do them good, and to render him their daily Praises for all his Kindnesses to them. And,

Can there be a more true or comfortable Representation of absolute Sovereignty, than this? Or, can any Man have reason to dread the Power more than to be afraid of that Goodness from which it is inseparable? Again,

Thirdly. Absolute Sovereignty being the Sovereignty of a God, rich in Mercy to the Sons of Men, must induce Sinners to hope in his Patience, and be the strongest Motive to engage them to return unto him by Repentance, in Hopes of his pardoning Mercy. For,

If even after his Denunciation of Destruction to an Heathen *NINIVEH*, upon their "turning from their evil Ways, he repented of the Evil which he said he would do unto them; and did it not:"

If he had Pity on that great City, because "there were twelve Thousand of little Infants in it, and also much Cattle:" can we conceive that a God so gracious to the Beasts that perish, can yet be so severe to the Generality of the Souls of Men, as to leave them to perish everlastingly? — Can we conceive him so merciful to the little Infants of an Heathen City, and yet think him so cruel to
myriads

myriads of myriads of other Infants, both of Jews & Christians, as to condemn them to endless Torments for that which they could never help? Sure 'tis not easy to conceive that a God so pitiful even to the Beasts, should have no Compassion for the greatest Part of fallen Men.

II. The Dominion of God (as already explained, shewing in what Sense it is arbitrary, and in what it is not,) is as useful, as it is profitable: For, from both, useful Instruction ariseth; and indeed, there is nothing comprehended in the supreme Power and Dominion of God, of greater Importance, or more directly applicable to ourselves. For,

First, It allays all our Complaints, and silenceth all our Murmurings against God's Dispensations, in reference to all our temporal Concerns.

Since it hath pleased the great Ruler of the World to manifest his Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, in the Variety of his Works, and of his Dispensations towards his Creatures, we ought in this to recognize his absolute Supremacy, and with all Humility to acquiesce in his sovereign and uncontrollable Disposition of things.

As "for his good Pleasure, all things were created," there can, therefore, be no pretence of Injus-

172 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

Since then, no Right is done to any of them, seeing they could have no Rights capable of being violated, prior to their Being; nor, indeed, any Pretence of Unkindness, if their State is more eligible than Non-Existence; which must be acknowledged concerning the State in which all the Creatures were made.

Should, then, the thing formed, say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Every kind of Beings, and every Individual in them, have reason to be satisfied with the Condition appointed them, and no ground of Discontent; always supposing it to be better than Non-Existence.

God being the supreme Lord and Proprietor of all things, "may do what he will with his own," and therefore, may dispense them to whom he pleases, & in what Manner and Measure he sees fit; he also having given us a Right to use them only during his good pleasure; whensoever he is pleased to revoke them from us, we have just Cause to be thankful to him that we enjoyed them so long, but none to be displeased or discontented, that he calls for his own again: Nor to add,

That many times we ourselves, by our own Follies and Vices, do greatly contribute to their Removal.

Here then, in the first Sense, we are "in Patience to possess our Spirits," and acquiesce in his Dispo-

fals, saying with holy Job, (as the Greek most emphatically makes him speak,) "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken-away, as it seemed good to the Lord, so is it; blessed be the Name of the Lord."

And, In the latter Sense, to reflect on our ways, amend, and be wise. For,

The divine Government is not arbitrary in this; it is not administered by lawless Force, like that of the Tyrants of this World, but with the most impartial Equity tempered with Goodness, and directed in it's Exercise by the most perfect Wisdom.

"God hath spoken once, and twice I have also heard the same, that Power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth Mercy, for thou renderest to every Man according to his Work."

Tho he bestows his Gifts freely as a Sovereign, and makes what Distinctions he pleases among his Creatures; yet, in the Exercise of his moral Government, especially in the Distribution of final Recompenses, he will strictly observe the exactest Measures of Equity. (A) "He will not contend with

his
(A) To represent God as acting arbitrarily, in his Government of Mankind, using such Power as "the Potter does over the Clay, making one Vessel to Honour, and another to Dishonour," (i.e.) determining the awarding to them final Happiness and Misery, merely because he will, this is to destroy the true Notion of his Justice: in Effect, indeed, to deny it, & thereby to weaken the Security of religious Virtue,

174 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God.

his Creatures by his great Power; Nor shew his absolute Dominion "by crushing under his feet the Prisoners of the Earth," who have no Defence against his Might; but will, "without respect of Persons, render to all men according to their Works."

Which Consideration, as it is terrible to the wicked, whom no Power can screen from his just Displeasure, so it is a never-failing Encouragement to good men, who, "rejoicing in the Testimony of their Consciences, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity they have had their Conversation in the World, do, in this, assure their Hearts before him;" confident that his Power will not be employed against them, but for their Salvation; & therefore, because "He is God Almighty," the great & Omnipotent King, "they walk before him, and are perfect." But,

Secondly, This Submission further becomes us, when he takes away our Lives; or the Lives of our Friends; For,

Seeing it is he who "giveth to us all Life and Breath," and challengeth a Propriety in our Spirits, saying, "all Souls are mine;" When he thus separates these Souls from their respective Bodies, he only takes away his own, (viz) "the Souls that he gave," he being "the Father of Spirits."

Thirdly

Thirdly, Hence we may easily learn what Obligations we are under to yield Obedience to the good Will of God, according to our Power, since he hath given us all those Faculties by which we are enabled to obey him, and so must have a sovereign Right to require us to use them for his Honour & Service. Indeed, God, (by virtue of his Sovereignty and Dominion over us,) hath an absolute Right to require all that Love and Obedience which man is able to perform, because from him it was that he received all those Faculties by which he is enabled to perform his several Duties; For surely,

He must have a Right to engage us to serve him with those Faculties which he freely gave us, to the utmost of our Power.

When we render these to him, we do but "give him of his own;" for, "Of him, and to him, & thro him, are all things."

Let us, therefore, render him back the Glory due, the Tribute and Praise of living to his Glory. And, What should in an especial manner induce us to it, is, the Nature of the Attribute before us, his Government itself, which is not arbitrary, but according to the most perfect Equity, in Wisdom and Goodness. Whatever "God requires" of us, he at the same time "shows to be good," perfectly agreeable to the cool Dictates of our own Understandings;

§ 76 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God .

either what appears intrinsically good at first View , such as the Love of himself , and our Fellow-Creatures ; or what, upon calm Reflection , we must discern to have a necessary Connection with those principal Duties , as plain Consequences from them ; or as proper Means in order to our performing them.

And , where the Usefulness of such positive Appointments cannot be clearly discerned , our Obligation to the Observance of them does not arise from God's absolute Supremacy and natural Dominion over us , which cannot produce a reasonable & liberal Service ; but from a firm Persuasion of his immutable Rectitude and Goodness, and of his unerring Wisdom.

Tho we do not, at first View, see the Propriety & Expediency of every such Institution in particular , yet Deference to the perfect Wisdom and Goodness of our Ruler , who appointed it for our Advantage , should rationally determine us to use it with Diligence , and the best Application of our thinking Powers , that we may obtain the Benefit which God graciously intended by it. But,

Fourthly, We may hence also easily discern how much we are concerned to improve those Talents which God hath given us, to the Ends and Uses for which he hath imparted them to us.

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We are only Stewards of them, and "of Stewards it is required that they be sound faithful" in the Employ of their Master's Goods, not only for his Honour, but according to his Order.

God, (by virtue of his absolute Dominion over us,) may justly require this from our hands, and that we be neither idle nor unprofitable servants in the Work committed to us. And,

From the Parable of Talants we learn, that he expects that we should not "hide them in a Napkin," or be unprofitable Servants in the Enjoyments of them; but improve them so far to his Honour, and to the Ends for which he hath vouchsafed them, that, when he shall think-fit to call us to an Account for the Use of them, we may so render it, as to receive the happy Sentence of "Well-done, good and faithful Servants, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord."

Fifthly, Hence also we may find reason to acknowledge the Equity of the Commands of Self-Denial, and "taking up the Cross," which seem so grievous to Flesh and Blood, since all that God requires by them, is only to part with that which he freely gave us, and which, therefore, he may freely take-away from us again at his pleasure. But,

When we view this in a further Light, not only

Serm. XIX.

178 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

as by Right required ; but also in the Nature of a Virtue, and as a Safe-guard from Sin , (A) God having engaged himself by Promise to assist & support us by his Holy Spirit in the Discharge of this difficult Duty, & amply to reward it as an Obedience due to him on account of his absolute Dominion over us.

When we view it in this Light , what exceeding great Reason have we not only to acknowledge, but even to adore the Goodness of God , in his Government over us. (B) Again, Hence

(A) If we gratify our Passions in all things where we lawfully may , they will , by long Use and Indulgence , acquire a great Power and Empire over us, and it will be a difficult Task to deny them in any thing ; for , our Appetites make no Difference between an innocent & sinful Enjoyment, being only moved by Pleasure ; so that if we will effectually conquer and subdue them in all Instances that are sinful, we must take care that they grow not strong upon us in any Instances whatever.

So long as any temporal Good is inordinately sought-after , there is no true Self-Denial : And, he who cannot reject carnal for spiritual Delights, is not worthy of them.

(B) Self-Denial is not only the greater Foundation of all civil Virtue , but our Saviour also made it his first Law and Condition to all his Disciples ; and there is none above the Necessities of Life , but has frequent Opportunities for the Exercising this noble Quality. Indeed,

If we attend to the real Import of the Duty itself , so far as it is of general Obligation, we shall find nothing in it, so very unfavourable, as we may at first imagine. For,

To deny ourselves , is not to deny the whole of our Being ; that being

Hence we may learn how impossible it is that we should merit any thing from God by any Obedience or Service which we can pay unto him, since we perform it only by those Faculties and Aids which He hath freely given us, & so have only done our Duty, and performed that which he had an absolute Right to require from us. Upon the whole,

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being impracticable: nor is it to deny the most excellent Part of it, that being at least unnecessary: 'Tis only to deny our carnal Appetites, those "fleshy Lusts which war against the Soul;" or, if at any time it respects our Understandings, we are only to deny the Pride and Arrogance, not the sober Dictates, or the rational Entertainments of them. The Term, "SELF," is taken in the most confined Sense; for a part only, & that too, for the least valuable, and worst Part of us.

In this Sense, we may, nay we must "deny ourselves," and be pleased at the same time, (i e) we must deny the inferior, and please the superior Part of our Constitution; we must mortify our inordinate Affections and gratify our Reason & Conscience: "we must strive against the Law of our Members, and be subject to the Law of our Minds."

This, indeed, may appear to be a Contradiction to Flesh & Blood; but to the distinguishing Faculty of the human Nature, it is most agreeable.

It is only by reason of the injured Disorder of our Hearts, and the general Prevalency of evil Habits, which are apt to dispose us to contrary Dispositions, that a good Life is a self-denying One, which otherwise would be the constant Practice of Self-Love; and the Means of being happy here and hereafter, would evidently appear to be one and the same. Indeed,

Self-Denial is the most exalted Pleasure, and the Conquest of evil Habits the most glorious Triumph. — Nothing pleases a Man more than to know that he has avoided a foolish Action.

SERM. XIX.

280 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

The natural Effect of our Belief of this will make us duly sensible, and always mindful that we are necessarily under the Government of Almighty God, and that no Man is ever so much his own Master here, as possibly to be allowed to do what he will, or to follow the Devices & Desires of his own Heart, without Controul, as in a State of Anarchy, or lawless Condition; there being one Almighty God over the Universe, "in whose hands are all the Corners of the Earth," and in whose Kingdom, therefore, we must consequently reside; to whose Will we are all subject, and whose Laws we may not dispute, whose Proceedings we cannot resist nor amend, & to whom we are bound by the most indissoluble Bands of Allegiance;

To own and acknowledge God for our Lord and Sovereign above all others, to whom we are also subject in all our Ways; in every State & Condition of Life; at all times regarding, contemplating, & approving of his Government, as the Foundation of all the Duties of Religion, and without which Men naturally degenerate into "Workers of Iniquity:"

To yield him the Duty and Service of his Subjects & Vassals, in humble Adoration of his majesty, with all awful Reverence, devout Worship, intire Trust, and most universal Obedience :

To

To dread and beware of the great Evil of Sin, appearing hence not only a Matter of simple Folly, or private Inconvenience, (contrary to our Reason,) but also an Act of high Rebellion, and of public Mischief, against our natural Allegiance, and the Peace and Order of the World :

To submit, (in case of Offence & Disobedience,) quietly & patiently, without Murmuring, to whatever shall be inflicted on us ; as not happening to us through blind Necessity or sickle Chance, but as ordered for us by sovereign Right and Reason, that can do nothing rashly or unjustly : And, finally,

To be always exulting & rejoicing that We and all the World are under so just and gracious, and almighty Government ; it being well for the World, as for every particular Nation and Person in it, that "the Lord reigneth," & that "he is a King forever," whose Empire and Dominion is the only Security of their Order and Peace, directing Governments, and restraining Enemies on Earth, - "disappointing the Wisdom of the Wise, and defeating the Power of the Mighty ; frustrating the Tokens of Lyars, and making Diviners mad ; turning Wise-Men backward, and making their Knowledge foolish."

Insomuch, that the worst of Times would be worse, were they not in God's hands ; and none are really bad that are of his ordering.

Serm. XIX.

To

182 Of the supreme Majesty & Dominion of God :

To Conclude, Seeing the Dominion of God is productive of such Effects; seeing that both the Capacity of serving him, and also pleasing ourselves, is wholly derived from him, let us give unto him, (as we are most bounden,) the Honour & Glory of it.

(To him, therefore, (on account of his Might, Majesty, and Dominion,) be ascribed, (as is most due,) all Honour, with Praise and Thanksgivings in all Churches of the Saints, for ever. Amen.

SERMON XX.

Of the Moral Government of God.

Psalm, xcvi. 9. "With Righteousness shall he judge the World."

It is an Inquiry of the utmost Moment to Virtue & to human Happiness, how the Almighty Governour of the World is disposed and affected towards his Creatures whom he hath placed under his Law, as they observe it, or deviate from it, in their Actions.

It may be imagined, (as appears from the sense of some,) that tho the Universe and all Creatures in it, are the Work of an original, intelligent Cause, perfectly wise, powerful, and beneficent; and tho the whole Creation is governed by the sole superintending Providence of this Being, & particularly, that all the Instincts and Affections, planted in the Heart of Man, are his Workmanship; yet he doth not at all attend to the Temper and Behaviour of Men — That tho he hath given to his Creatures the Sense of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong, as a Means of serving those Purposes by them which he had

had in View, yet he himself hath not that Regard to Right & Wrong, which we find in our own Minds; nor any thing analogous to it: and that therefore, he is not displeased with the Transgression of this Law of our Natures, nor hath any Pleasure or Complacency in our Obedience; and that we are never to expect any Interposition of his, to give us Tokens of his Favour for having pursued that which was Right, or of his Displeasure for having done what was Wrong: — That men are, by the Laws of Nature, thoroughly furnished for serving the Purposes of this Life; but that this is all that is to be expected; & that by establishing & maintaining this Constitution of things, the Creator hath made Provision for preserving the World in that state, which will answer his original Design.

Very different from this, is the Sense of those, who consider the Supreme-Being, as a Law-Giver, and a moral Governour, in the proper Sense of the Word; believing that he hath, in the Sense of Right and Wrong, written a Law upon the Heart of every Man, and hath planted in every Man a Conscience to approve or disapprove of his Actions, as they are Good or Evil; so he is himself attentive to the Conduct of every Individual; is pleased with the Conformity of his Temper and Actions to the Law that
he

he hath given him, and displeased with the Transgressions of it; and will interpose to testify his Pleasure or Displeasure by such Rewards or Punishments, as perfect Wisdom shall see necessary to answer the Ends of a moral Administration fit for supporting & encouraging Virtue, as the most excellent of all things; for discouraging Vice, our greatest Debasement, and so preserving good Order in his own Creation; — And, that tho God doth not interpose, in the present State of Things, so as fully to answer what Reason ultimately expecteth from a perfect Moral Ruler, in rewarding the Good and punishing the Bad; yet, another State of things is to be expected, in which the great Design of his Moral Administration will be perfected, and He, as Judge of the World, will do right to every Subject of his Moral Kingdom, Now.

Whether the Supreme Being doth not act the part of such a Ruler, is an Inquiry, unquestionably, of the utmost Consequence.

If Men believe that he doth act it, then, there is an unspeakable Weight laid into the Scale of Virtue, additional to all the Considerations of the Beauty and Excellency of it, and of the present Advantages annexed to it in the pleasing Approbation of Conscience, and the happy Fruits of it with respect to Health, Character and Estate. And,

Serm. XX.

There

There is nothing which can so effectually deter men from Vice, as a thorough Persuasion, that by it they displease their Maker and supreme Ruler, and that he will one Day interpose to make them sensible of this, by inflicting Punishments proportioned to their Crimes. And, as the Dread of this must give great Pain to the Disobedient; so, from a Sense of God's moral Government, and a Consciousness of being the Objects of his Favour, the most pleasing and joyful Hopes spring-up to the Virtuous and Good. — So that all men must be affected, and be induced from hence to conduct themselves in a very different manner, as they do, or do not believe, that God acts the part of a Moral-Governour over them.

That, therefore, in this great Argument, every man, who will attend to the first Principles of Reason and Morality, may come to a satisfactory Decision in his own Mind, let us begin with those things, which are most simple and plain, and try how far, clear and sound Reasoning will carry us towards a Proof of the Doctrine before us.

Every Man findeth, that he himself, his Powers and Faculties, his Temper, Instinct, & Inclinations, are the Objects of his reflecting Thoughts, and of various Operations of his Understanding, and Affections of the Heart. And surely, No Man can
imagine

imagine, that the Creator of all hath not this reflecting Power himself, by which his Existence & Perfections become the Objects of his own Contemplation. Again,

We know, that in the Power & Faculties conferred upon us, & in the Instincts & Affections, which are planted in the Heart, we have a Perception of Excellency that is delightful to us. Some things in our Frame and Constitution, we esteem, as they are of great Use in Life; Other things are not only Useful, but in themselves, Lovely. And! Must we not likewise believe, that the Supreme Being hath a Perception of Excellency in his own Perfections? Or, doth it not appear most absurd, to ascribe Perfection to him in the highest Degree, & at the same time to suppose, that he discerneth no Excellency in it! The most glorious State of Existence possible, and yet hath no Sense of this, nor Delight resulting from the Contemplation of it! The Mind of Man immediately pronounceth this the most unnatural of all Conceptions.

Let us apply this particularly to the Goodness of God. — We see the plain Footsteps of Goodness in all his Works. — We discern it in the kind & good Affections, which are planted in the heart of man: we see it in innumerable things, with which Provi-

dence hath furnished us, which are not at all necessary for the Support of Life, but contrived merely for our Delight : we discern in the general system of things about us, which doth not manifest any thing like a Design formed and carried on, to make living Creatures miserable, but directly the Reverse, seeing the Laws of Nature, without Exception, do all tend to the Good and Happiness of the Creation. Now,

Goodness ever appeareth to our Minds excellent and lovely; and as we clearly perceive that God is good, and have reason to ascribe Goodness to him in it's highest Perfection, can it enter into the Heart of Man, that he hath not a Perception of Excellency ; — That he doth not delight in his own perfect Goodness ? - Will any Man say that it is not in it's Nature most excellent and lovely ? - And shall we imagine, that the Supreme, most perfect Mind doth not discern this ? — And, if he hath a Perception of Excellency in Goodness, & loveth it, then surely, that which is contrary to Goodness, and is therefore, discerned to be unlovely and deformed, must be the Object of his Aversion.

To say, that God hath no Perception of Excellence in his Goodness, and that he hath no Delight in the Contemplation of it, is to say, that he is incapable of the highest Happiness, of which we have
any

proved from Reason.

189

any Idea : & indeed, not only so, but that he is incapable of that Happiness which he hath actually communicated to his Creatures, & which is the most perfect Enjoyment of Being : an Happiness, which surely cannot be incompatible with the highest Perfection ; but which, indeed, according to all our Ideas & Reasoning, necessarily springeth from it.

In the same Manner we may reason concerning any Quality or Disposition in the Divine Mind, that falleth under a moral Consideration, as Becoming, Lovely, and Right ; the contrary to which, is, and must be, Wrong. But further,

As God hath planted in his Creatures a Power, by which they apprehend what is Good and Right and approve it ; and condemn what is Evil and Wrong : It is certain, that he must himself know what is Good & right, and what is Evil & Wrong. For, He must necessarily know the whole of that which He hath given to his Creatures, a clear Perception. And, if so, and at the same time he is utterly regardless of Right and Wrong, this is not only not what Reason directeth us to suppose in the most perfect Mind ; but is that, from which we cannot separate the Idea of Depravity and the greatest Imperfection ; an Insensibility to, and an utter Negligence of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong, appearing clearly to the Mind ! Doth not this car-

Serm. XX.

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ry in it the Idea of the greatest Defect possible? And, will ever Nature? will ever the Heart of Man suggest any such thing with respect to the Original of all Excellency and Perfection?

Let this, then, be fixed in the first place, that God hath a Perception of Excellency in his own Goodness & Righteousness; that he is delighted & happy in them; and that whatever is contrary to them, must be disagreeable to him, and of course, the Object of his Dislike and Aversion. And,

When this is fixed as a Principle, not to be contested, it will be perfectly clear to the Mind, (as a Consequence from it,) that God hath planted in the Heart of Man the Sense of Right and Wrong, not merely to serve certain Purposes in his Creation, which were necessary to the Accomplishment of his own great Design, without being himself at all affected by any such Sense; but that he hath given it as a Law, with our Obedience to which he cannot but be pleased; as he must be displeased with our Negligence of it, and our Transgressions against it.

If he hath Complacency in his own Moral Perfections, he must necessarily have Complacency in those moral Agents, who, by obeying his Laws, become, according to the Measure of their Capacity, conformable to it; and they, who do not so obey, must necessarily

necessarily fall under his Displeasure. (A) Indeed, Every man will see it is impossible, that a Being, who perceiveth Excellency in Goodness, and Deformity in Evil, to whom the former, as such, is lovely, and the latter hateful, should not regard Moral Agents, who do that which is good, with Approbation & Love; and with Dislike & Displeasure, those who do evil.

What, that can be called Perfection, could we ascribe to a Being, who had no Respect to Good & Evil, to Right & Wrong, in his Conduct? - Without this Respect, there is no such thing as Excellency or Worth at all. — On the contrary, in having it to the highest Perfection, according to all our Ideas and Apprehensions, the highest Excellency consisteth. And surely, Nothing

(A) We cannot doubt of God's most compassionate Affection for the Righteous, if we consider,

First, that the Lord our God is righteous, and therefore must love Righteousness.

The Lord our God is excellent, & therefore, must love Excellency, and every thing that tends towards it. Now, the Wicked, we all know, (as the Scripture records unto us) are Vile and base: Whereas, the Saints are called "The excellent of the Earth." "The Heart," the best thing in the Wicked, "is little worth:" Whereas, they who truly fear him, are, by God himself, styled "his Jewels & peculiar Treasure." "His Soul hath no Pleasure in the Wicked." - "The Wicked, & him that doth Violence, doth his Soul abhor; but he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and they that are Upright in the way, are his De-

Nothing can be more natural, than to believe, that the Supreme Being, who governs the whole Universe, and who hath made a Multitude of Creatures capable of discerning Right and Wrong, will support that Respect to this Distinction, which constitutes a right Moral Character, and which maketh his Creatures resemble his own Perfection.

Hence it will be evident, that the perfect Goodness of God is not to be considered as a Principle of Action, exerting itself indiscriminately, to communicate all possible Pleasure and Happiness to his Creatures, without regard to Moral Characters. - To do so, might, in some Sense, be called Goodness; but

light." - "With the Upright he will shew himself upright, and to the Pure, he will shew himself pure."

II. As God is perfectly possessed of all Perfection, and Righteousness tendeth towards it.

The holy Person, and he that doeth Righteousness, is the fairest Transcript and the best Resemblance of his most holy Nature.

As, therefore, an earthly Father is more honoured when he is imitated by his Son in his conspicuous Virtues, than when he hath only the Praises of his Tongue, or the Labour of his Hands; So is our heavenly Father honoured, not so much by the Labour of our Lips, or by our outward Services, as by the inward Purity, by which we become like unto him in our Nature: which Parity of Nature will cause reciprocal Pleasure. Similitude is the Ground of Love: This renders us his obedient Children, who therefore, must bear a kind Affection to the Resemblances of himself, tho' but little and imperfect.

proved from Reason,

193

but, it could not possibly consist with that Distinction between Moral-Agents, as by doing that which is Good, they become necessarily the Objects of his Divine Approbation; or by doing evil, they become necessarily the Objects of his Displeasure; which Distinction God will ever maintain, & which his own unchangeable Perfection maketh it impossible for him to neglect.

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As God did at first create Man after the Image of his Power, so doth he now create the "New Man" after the Image of his Purity, "in Righteousness and true Holiness." He must, therefore, lay aside his own Nature and Perfection, and forger Kindness to himself, should he forget to shew Good-Will to those, who resemble him in Righteousness, and shew forth the Effects of it in their Lives.

III. God cannot cease to love true Holiness and Righteousness in whomsoever it resides, because it is the Fruit of his own Holy Spirit; for no Man ever yet hated his own Workmanship, the Operation of his own Hands, but favours and cherishes it, as begotten by him.

Again, God cannot cease to bear a kind Affection to Righteousness, because he receives the greatest Honour by it, - because it so highly tends to the Glory of his Name, which is the principal Design of all his Actions. It is by being an holy Nation, a peculiar People, separated from the World, that we "shew forth the Virtues of him that hath called us from Darkness into his most marvelous Light;" - It is by the "Light of our good Works, shining before Men, that we glorify our Father which is in Heaven;" - It is by those "Fruits of Righteousness, which are thro Jesus Christ, that we minister to the Praise and Glory of God." Again,

Not only to God, but to Ourselves also doth this bring Honour. The Saints are stiled "the Excellent of the Earth." Sin renders us vile and despicable in the Eyes of God; whereas, the Righteous, (i.e)

Serm. XX,

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In this, the Foundation is laid of a moral Government, under which the good, who are obedient to the Laws, which God hath given them, are not only assured of being the Objects of his Approbation & Favour, but have Reason to expect, that He, who is the Sovereign-Ruler of the Universe, will testify his Approbation, by taking Care of, and making them happy; and the disobedient and wicked have Reason to apprehend, that they shall suffer under his Displeasure. This

“they that deal truly, are his Delight.” And, as they are in his Account, who is the truest Judge of Excellency, so also are they in the Eyes of all who have true Wisdom to discern, and true Discretion to judge of what is truly excellent.

Earthly Pomp and Greatness may make Men honourable in the Eyes of a mistaken & injudicious World; but it is only “the Ornament of a good and virtuous Mind which renders even the King’s Daughter all-glorious within. Supreme Authority may give some faint Resemblance of the Greatness and Majesty of God; but, it is the Righteous Person only, who is the truest Emblem of Holiness, and upon that Account is said to “live the Life of God, and to shew-forth his Virtues in it.” Now,

If it be a great Honour to resemble PRINCES, even only in outward Features and Appearance; What Honour must it be to be the Living-Image of the Deity, and to resemble him in the more noble Qualities and Virtues of an holy Soul! Again,

We hereby reflect Honour upon our excellent Religion, as well as upon the Author of it, and Ourselves who are to obey it. We hereby convince the World that a Religion, which begets such excellent Spirit

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This is what Nature directeth us to look for from a perfect Moral Ruler, and that He will, by certain Acts of his own, reward the good and dutiful, and punish Transgressors.

Here it is to be considered, that in the present State of things, God hath established a Constitution, by which he hath annexed Joy and Delight to the Practice of Righteousness, with manifold other Advantages, with respect to Health, Reputation, and Estate; and so ordered things, that the Sinner shall be exposed to Suffering in these respects, by his own perverse Ways; as we see great Misery to be, frequently, the natural and unavoidable Consequence of Vice.

This in us, is "worthy of all Acceptation;" and, that Holy is that God, who hath prescribed such admirable Rules of Holy-Living, whose Precepts tend so manifestly to the Advancement of the Human Nature, & to the Transformation of it into the Likeness of the Deity.

These are some of the many Reasons why God is supposed to love Righteousness, (i.e) those who are Righteous.

By this we resemble God in one of his chief Excellencies, - And honour him in that Perfection which is dearest to him, and counted by him as the chief Glory of his Nature. - By this we make a real Declaration, that he is the best & most amiable Being, as counting nothing besides him, valuable, or worthy of Imitation. This Life of Holiness keeps up the Reputation of Religion and of God in the World, and attracts others to the Love both of Him and It. And, consequently, reflects great and abundant Honour and Advantage to the real Observers of it. — The Effects of Wickedness are the entire Reverse.

Serm. XX.

This Constitution is of great Moment, and indeed, in some respects, the principal thing in the Divine Administration; and sheweth evidently, that the Supreme Being is a Friend to Virtue; and in it we discover most important Steps of a moral Government. For, While the Constitution remaineth, Virtue will be, in a great measure, Reward; and Vice a Punishment to itself. But surely, this is not all that is to be expected under a perfect moral Administration. For,

If God should no otherwise interpose to testify his Pleasure or Displeasure, as his Subjects have, or have not obeyed his Laws, it would be just the same thing, as if there were no Superintendent of our Conduct and Actions at all. And,

If we should suppose, that such a Constitution, once framed, could subsist without any Attention of the Author to it, or Care of it, or any Interposition of his whatever; it would be the same thing, as if there ^{was} not any God at all.

A perfect moral Government implies in it, that the Supreme Ruler is attentive to every Individual; and that as he is pleased or displeased with the moral Conduct, so he will, by certain Acts, make his Pleasure or Displeasure most certainly manifest; so that the Dutiful and Obedient shall find themselves Gainers by having rendered themselves the Objects

Objects of his Favour, and the Rebellious shall suffer for their Sins.

For the Illustration of this, let it be attended to, that there are many things, the Objects of our Hopes and Fears, which are entirely in the Sovereign Power of God, and are not at all connected with, or depending upon that Original Constitution, that hath been mentioned, in which many Advantages are annexed to the Practice of Virtue and Disadvantages and Suffering to Vice. — Such are, principally, the Continuance and Extinction of our Being, which is a Matter, that lieth at the Foundation of all; and, such are all the Favours and Blessings, with all the Evils and Calamities, which, by Divine Providence, are appointed in our Lot, quite independent of our Conduct. And yet, there is no Man but what is sensible, that his State, with respect to Happiness or Misery, may be greatly affected by them. Now,

From God, considered as a perfect Moral-Ruler, such an Attention to Individuals is to be expected, that in determining on these Matters, which are wholly in his Sovereign Power, and quite independent of any Agency of ours, he should shew, that he loveth and approveth of the Good, and is displeased with the Wicked; and that the Administration should be such, that without Exception, Men

should receive according to their Works.

Particularly, - If we are at present Sufferers by studying to do our Duty, and to please our Maker; If we meet with Persecution in Character, Estate, or Life, by wicked Oppressors, Nature directeth us to hope that He, as Sovereign Lord and Judge, will interpose to redress our Grievances, and right our Wrongs; and that he will not permit Unrighteousness finally to triumph in our Sufferings: And, if we saw a most distressful Lot appointed by Providence for a Person of Worth, while the Wicked flourish'd in all imaginable Prosperity, we should expect such a Turn, as would compensate for the Sufferings of the Righteous, and make it manifest that God was their Friend; while the Wicked should find, that notwithstanding his past Prosperity, he was really an Object of Displeasure to his Maker: and we sh'd most assuredly expect, whatever became of the bad and vicious, the Governour of the World would not destroy the Beings of such as obeyed, and made it their Study to please him; but that he would continue them in Existence, and that in such a State, as would give them Opportunity and Encouragement to the Practice of Righteousness, the most excellent thing in the Creation.

Such is the Language of Nature concerning the
Government

Government of God; and Violence must be done to Nature, and the Sentiments of our Hearts opposed, before Men can go into contrary Schemes. But, as in the present State of things, no such Distinction, in all respects, is made between the Good & bad, as, under a Government perfectly righteous and impartial, we might reasonably expect, it is evident that the Scene is not closed in this World, but that we shall exist after Death, and in that State of Existence, the Scheme of a Moral-Government, of which we evidently see the Foundations laid here, will be carried on to Perfection.

This is that, in which we must rest. This the Heart immediately embraces, as the only clear Solution of all the Difficulties, with which, upon any other Hypothesis, we are embarrassed.

Many are the Arguments, which have been offer'd for the Immortality of the Soul, taken from the Nature of it as an immaterial Substance, - from the Extent of it's Powers and Faculties, and the Improvement without End, of which it is capable; - from that Sense of Devotion, which is manifestly it's Supreme Good, and which hath no necessary Connection with the Enjoyments of mere Animal Life.

But indeed, the strongest and most satisfying Argument, which Reason affordeth, seems to be taken from God's Moral-Government. For,

If He acts as a Moral-Ruler at all, we cannot doubt, but that his Government will be the most perfect, and under which no Individual will find just Reason to complain. But, if there be one single Instance, (as really there have been many,) in which a Person perisheth in the Support and Defence of the Cause of Truth and Righteousness, this cannot be the Case; - there would then be a Foundation for Complaint.

God hath planted in the Heart of Man certain Principles, by which he intended the Conduct sh'd be regulated. In acting upon these Principles, & doing the Will of God, Men have often been obliged to give-up all temporal Possessions and Enjoyments, and even Life itself: These they must have parted with, or have violated their own Conscience, and acted in Contradiction to the Will of God: and yet, under a perfect Administration, under which these Sacrifices in the Cause of Virtue must be had in the highest Estimation, they are to have no real Redress for this Suffering, but sink at Death into Non-Existence, equally with the most worthless & abandon'd.

Every impartial and attentive Person will immediately judge, that it is impossible, that this should be the Case; or that the Expectation, (which we cannot avoid forming upon the Principles of this

Discourse

Discourse,) should be all mere Delusion, and that we should at best be finally cheated, even to the Loss of our Existence, by cleaving to that, which, according to our present frame, must appear to us, above all things, excellent & pleasing to our Maker.

If then, there be a perfect, Moral Government, there must be a future State. If we give-up the latter, we must give-up the former. — And indeed, every one who will candidly weigh the Arguments for it, will be so convinced, that nothing, but a Demonstration of the Impossibility of our Existing after Death, could make him believe, that, at Death, the Scene is entirely closed; and surely, no Man will undertake to demonstrate this. Is it not most natural, indeed unavoidable, for oppressed Virtue, suffering under vexatious Persecution and ill Usage of every kind, suffering Torments & Death, to look up to the Power above, as it's Sanctuary, for Redress and Deliverance? and the Mind could be overwhelmed with nothing, so much as an Imagination, that there is no such Power, or that no Friendship or Protection is to be expected from it. To be persuaded of this, must make the World appear a gloomy Scene indeed, and the great Family of God, as if it had no Head, seeing those Purposes of Government, which are the most material, would not be at all answered. Nay,

In what Sense at all, can God be said to be the Governor of Moral Agents, if he hath no Regard to their Actions, good or Evil? And they are, therefore, to have no Respect to him, from whom, however they conduct Life, they are to expect neither Love nor Hatred, nor any thing to hope or fear, & so may be said, in truth, to have nothing to do with him. And, there really seemeth to be no Medium, either we must regard God as our Moral-Ruler, with whom, therefore, we have a very near, and most important of all Connections; or else think and act, as if there was no God at all over us. — And, what is of the utmost Importance in this matter, is, that our Constitution naturally leads us to fall-in with the Conception of God, as our Moral-Ruler, to whom we are alway accountable. — Whereas, by entertaining Conceptions of an intelligent Being, who is the Cause of all things, and who hath given us the Sense of Right & Wrong, & yet doth not at all regard our Moral Conduct, the utmost Violence is done to our natural Conceptions of the Order of the Moral World, and the Mind is intirely unhinged, and lost in Confusion and Dissatisfaction.

But, that the same is now intended — Our
 Father, who has introduced a Religion fitted to
 the World to come. —

SERMON XXI.

On the same Subject.

**Pſalm, xcvi. 9. "With Rightcouſneſs ſhall he
 judge the World."**

The Arguments already drawn from Nature and
 Reason, in Proof of the Moral-Government of God,
 we find fully eſtabliſhed and confirmed in the Holy
 Scripture, where, by expreſs Revelation, we are aſ-
 ſured, that "God will judge the World in Right-
 couſneſs," and give to every Man according to his
 Works." — "With Rightcouſneſs ſhall He judge
 the World."

Under the Jewish-Adminiſtration, which was of
 a very peculiar kind, the Sanctions of the Divine
 Law were taken from temporal things. — Proſperity
 was promiſ'd to that people, while they were obedient
 to the Laws of God; & great Adverſity was threat-
 ned, if they ſhould be rebellious againſt him, which
 Promiſes were all-along minutely fulfilled. Indeed,
 that whole Economy plainly ſuppoſed & maniſeſted,
 an extraordinary Interpoſition, peculiar to the Jews.

But

But, that Dispensation is now superseded — Our Blessed Saviour hath introduced a Religion fitted & designed to be universal; and all the Sanctions of his Laws are taken from the World to come. — “He hath brought Life and Immortality” for the righteous, clearly “to Light,” & hath pointed out a State of Punishment for the rebellious & impenitent. He teacheth us that there will a Time come, when the Servants of God, and the Subjects of his Kingdom shall be called to an account for their Improvement of the Talents with which they have been intrusted; and that while the slothful and wicked Servant shall be rejected and punished; the dutiful, and he who was attentive to his Master’s Will, and to the Business allotted to him, shall be accepted & rewarded; and that, in Proportion to the Improvement he hath made. — When the Great Judge cometh, He will call all Mankind to Account. — He will separate them according to their real Characters,” as a Shepherd divideth the Sheep from the Goats;” — that “the Wicked shall go into everlasting Punishment, and the Righteous into Life eternal.” — He teacheth, that “they who suffer for Righteousness’ Sake, shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven,” and that upon this Account their Sufferings may be Matter of real and exceeding Joy to them, And that “the Righteous shall hereafter shine as the Sun, in the Kingdom of their

their Father." — He sheweth us, that they only shall be accepted of God, who do his Will; and that all Hopes, founded upon any thing else, is building upon the Sand.

The sacred Writers after him, assure us of the same things, (viz) that "to them, who by patient Continuance in Well-doing, seek for Honour, and Glory, and Immortality, shall be given eternal Life: and to them, who do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish," are in reserve, to every Soul of Man, who doth evil, whether he be Jew or Gentile, Bond or Free; for, "there is no Respect of Persons with God."

And, as the Holy Scriptures do thus clearly point out a future State, which shall be a State of Rewards & Punishments; so do they use the strongest Expressions and most significant Metaphors, to set forth the Happiness of the Righteous, and the Sufferings of the Wicked and finally impenitent.

But, as Mankind are all of them chargeable with Guilt and great moral Imperfections, having "all sinned, & come short of the Glory of God;" so "Repentance and Remission of Sins are preached in the Name of Christ to all Nations; so that if the unrighteous Man forsaketh his Sins, and turneth to the

Serm, XXI.

Lord

Lord, He will have Mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him ;" for, "there is no Condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, the Lord ; who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit."

We are likewise clearly informed, that not sinless Perfection, but Sincerity, is the Term of our Acceptance with God : and we have all possible Encouragement to Obedience from the great and precious Promises of the Assurance of God's Holy Spirit, and that He will always countenance & encourage our good Attempts, and give us effectual Aid, if we are not wanting to ourselves. — In a Word, we are assured, that all, who come-up to the Terms of Acceptance declared in the Gospel, shall be acquitted in the great Day of Judgement.

In all this, the Gospel speaketh a Language, most perfectly agreeable and pleasing to every ingenious Mind ; and therein we have the Authority of God expressly interposed to establish our Faith in his moral Government, & to point out clearly the measures of his Administration, which must to all, who are unprejudiced, appear most worthy of his spotless Purity, & infinite Goodness ; & which proceeding with that Regard to true Worth & Holiness, which due to it, must, in the Judgement of all, who can discern, really be the most excellent of all things.

things. — Indeed, This may be said, to be the only thing which is excellent, in as much as nothing is truly so, but by being derived from it. — Power & Understanding, in the utmost Extent, separate from Goodness and Rectitude, must appear great & dreadful; but they are not lovely: It is by their being under the Influence of Goodness, that they become a viable — And, if we separate from any Being or Character, Righteousness and Goodness, there remaineth nothing in our Idea of it, which the Mind can, in any way, pronounce to be excellent.

Having thus explained the Foundations of God's Moral Government, and maintained it, I shall now make some practical Reflections from it. And,

First, It must undoubtedly be Matter of great Joy to every well-disposed Mind, that Righteousness is constantly the Object of principal Attention to the supreme Being, that it will be constantly under his Care and Protection; and that however it may suffer in the present State of Imperfection and Discipline, yet it shall be finally happy; and that while we have the Testimony of Conscience to our sincere Endeavours to conduct Life according to the Law originally written upon our Hearts, & the Precepts given us in the Word of God, studying to cor-

rest whatever we know to have been amiss in us, & to cultivate every worthy and good Disposition of Soul, we shall be the Objects of our Maker's Love and complacental Regard, that He will take care of our Interests, and make us forever happy; - that the Rules and Measures of his Administration are unalterable, and he will do what is Right; so, in all Events, it will be well with the Righteous.

- Were it not so, and we could only suppose, that the Supreme Ruler did not love Righteousness, and would not take care of it, in what malancholy Light must the Universe appear? - What a painful Reflection! that, what he cannot but account the most excellent thing in the Creation of God, should be neglected? that in the Eye of the Parent of the Universe, Right and Wrong, the good & evil, the very best, and the very worst moral Character, made no Difference with respect to his Regard & Favour!

- These are things which must greatly discourage the Notaries of Virtue, and make way for the Prevalency of all irregular and vicious Passions. For, Who, but must imagine, that the planting in the Heart of Man a Sense of Excellency in Virtue, was attended as a mere Delusion, if it is supposed that the Almighty Governour of the World maketh no Account of it? And! What man would be esteem-

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med to act a wise part, in suffering for the sake of Virtue and of Conscience, and losing his very Being in that Cause? Nay, If there is no Regard in the Power who governeth all, to Right and Wrong, who could form any Judgement of his Administration? And what Rule could we have for directing our Expectations from it? — On the contrary,

How pleasing to think, that he, who governeth all, is perfectly, and unchangeably Good and Holy, and that He will ever act the part of a Friend to Righteousness; that the whole of his Administration will be regulated with an Eye to it, & that his Almighty Power will ever be engaged in the Support and Defence of it? — How pleasing to think, that as his Eye is upon every Individual, so he will graciously notice and reward every good Action; that the least thing, done from good and worthy Principles, shall not be overlooked, nor forgotten?

How perfectly in Character did our Blessed Saviour speak, when he said, "Whosoever shall give a Cup of cold Water to one of these Little-Ones, in the Name of a Disciple, shall, in no ways, lose his Reward?"

It is very comfortable to think, that by doing that which is good, we become the Objects of our Maker's Esteem & Love. This, (above all things,) gratifieth that Desire of Honour, which is so natu-

ral to the human Heart, and prevaieth most in the most ingenuous Minds. — But, to know further, that Virtue & true Holiness will be the Objects of our Maker's Care, & that in all Events he will provide, that it shall be well with the Righteous, is the very strongest Encouragement to the Practice of Righteousness, which can be given. — As, (on the other hand,) What can so effectually deter Men from Vice, as to know, that by doing that, which is Evil, they fall under the Displeasure of the Supreme Being; that they shall not go unpunished, but have such Penalties inflicted upon them, as are necessary to serve the Purposes of his perfect Moral Administration?

In a Word, — As there is, in this Administration, the most perfect and beautiful Order; so without it, there is nothing which could be called Order; and we could have no Security of Happiness in Existence. — For surely, an indiscriminating Goodness could give us no such Security, a Goodness exerted consistently with all the Oppression of the Virtuous, and all the Malignity of the bad and vicious, and making no Distinction between them.

It is a strong Presumption in Favour of the Religion of Christ, as a Religion of Divine Authority, that it hath so clearly and fully established the Belief of God's moral Government.

What

What we are led to by the Principles of Reason & Morality, is fully explained and brought home to the Heart of every Man by the Christian Revelation. — Hereby every Man is enabled to judge, whether he is, or is not, the Object of his Maker's Pavour; whether he is to look for Reward or Punishment, Happiness or Misery in the World to come.

From hence, therefore, we may reasonably infer, that the Opposition which hath been made to the Religion of Christ, and Attempts to overthrow the Authority of it, may be owing, partly at least, to the Lusts of men, which cannot bear the Severity of the Christian Discipline, & must be ever, therefore, at Enmity with the Purity of the Christian Spirit.

When men have not learned to deny themselves, but will indulge in unlawful Gratifications, the Christian Religion will be grievous unto them, as it presenteth to their Minds future Scenes exceedingly awful, a righteous Judgement to come, & severe Punishment in reserve for the wicked & impenitent.

But, should such Persons be able to overthrow, in their own Judgements, the Authority of that Religion, they are yet never the nearer their great Purpose of providing for the Tranquillity of their Minds in vicious Courses, while they have reason to believe God's Moral Government of the World.

To make themselves quite easy, it is necessary for them to get the better of all the Principles of natural Religion, as well as Christianity; which is a thing never to be done. For, these Principles have such a Foundation in Reason and Nature, and in the Sense of Right and Wrong, that, till this is intirely exterminated, all their Attempts are in vain. And,

On the other hand, No Man, who believes God's Government, and can be pleased, and think himself happy under such an Administration, but must be a Friend to the Religion of Christ, and with the universal Prevalency of the true Spirit of it. And,

If any Man should be capable of rooting out of his Mind all the Principles of natural Religion, and of exterminating the Sense of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong, intirely; What a State must he be in? Lost to all Sense of Excellency and Beauty in Life! Lost to all human Enjoyment! - Incapable of being esteemed or loved! - Not disposed to confer, and unworthy of receiving any Favour! - Words cannot describe it. But,

Secondly, As we do all profess firmly to believe our Maker's moral Government, let us act as becomes such a Persuasion. Setting God ever before us, let us endeavour, in all respects, to approve ourselves to him, accounting it not only our unquesti-
onable

possible Duty, but our highest Interest to do those things which are pleasing; and avoiding, as the greatest Evil, whatever is displeasing in his Sight.

What can our principal Business in human Life be, but to do the Will of God? - If this great Point is not attended to, what can our Labours or Diligence in any other Matters avail, to the true Ends and Purposes of our Being? How ridiculous and absurd an Appearance doth that Person make, who employs himself in every thing else, but his own proper Business, of which he is wholly ignorant!

"Let no man, therefore, deceive us; He only who doth Righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." Our Religion, to answer its declared End, must consist in that Temper and Course of Life, which is an Imitation of God, in all Purity, and in the Fruits of the Spirit in Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth. These are the things which make Men meet for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light. And, that Religion which is summed-up in the Love of God and our Neighbour, is what Faith was intended to produce; and is the great Design of the Gospel, in which sincere Christians, "with open Face beholding, as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, are changed into the same Image, from Glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" &c. It is the most manifest Abuse of the Gospel, and of the

the Goodness and Mercy of God, made manifest in it, to mis-represent it so, that it may be understood to undermine the Foundations of true Morality, & of that Government, under which every Individual shall be accepted or rejected according to his real Character, and "reap as he hath sowed."

Believe it, there must be Repentance from dead Works, - there must be Holiness of Heart & Life, with the Love of God, and the Character be formed intire, before we can rationally hope for Acceptance.

This is the Language of Nature, as well as of the Holy Scriptures, every where. But,

III. For such as continue in a wicked Course of Life, how awful the Apprehensions, which arise from the Moral Government of God! They are unquestionably the Objects of his Displeasure, which will be made manifest to them one Day, in the most sensible manner. They may, for a while, flourish & have all that Heart can wish, but it will not always be so. The holy Scriptures, (as already observed,) give us very strong Representations of the Misery of bad Men, in a State of Punishment. And

What Penalties, & Degree of Punishment, it may be fit for the righteous Judge of the World to inflict, that the Ends of a perfect moral Administration may be answered, who can tell? — Doubtless, some there

there are, who greatly impose upon themselves, in this matter, not willing to admit the Thoughts of any thing, which to them appeareth severe in the the divine Administration. — They know that God is infinitely merciful and good, that it is impossible he should have Pleasure in the Miseries of his Creatures; and that it is no way probable, that there should be such grievous Sufferings of bad Men hereafter, as some would persuade themselves to believe,

To this it may be answered, that God cannot have Pleasure in the Sufferings of his Creatures; (i.e) cannot have Pleasure, merely in putting them to Pain, is most certain; and that he is infinitely good and merciful, we see from the whole of his Administration, and especially in the Gospel of our Lord.

But, at the same Time; it is no less certain, that He will make a Distinction between the Good and the bad, the Obedient and Rebellious against his Authority; & that he will be just & true to himself, as Supreme Ruler, in answering, in the most perfect Manner, the Ends of his Government; & what Punishment Wisdom may see fit and necessary to these Ends, he will inflict upon the wicked & impenitent. — In Truth,

Nothing can be more terrible to wicked men than the Certainty, we have, that God ruleth in perfect Righteousness.

Righteousness. — Were we to imagine any thing capricious in his Administration, any thing which could be called Humour or Passion, there might be hope, that sometimes, as least, it might take a Turn, favourable to the bad. — But, when there is nothing done but what is perfectly righteous, no Punishment inflicted, but what perfect Wisdom directeth, and what perfect Goodness approveth, we are sure that the righteous Lord will be inflexible in it, and that his Measures will never vary.

Notwithstanding his infinite Goodness, of which we have the clearest and most satisfying Proof; yet, we see that in this World, there have been dreadful Instances of Suffering & Misery, in the Course of Providence, inflicted upon his Creatures.

In the Sacred-History, we meet with many very awful and affecting Accounts of this kind, in which God is said, to have intended the Punishment for wicked Generations of Men, and of particular Persons. — And, in other Histories, we meet with frequent Instances of dreadful Calamities, befalling Nations, Families, and Individuals.

— All these are consistent with the most perfect Goodness of the Supreme Ruler; and show, that Goodness, in it's utmost Extent & Perfection, may admit of Severity, especially, in inflicting proper Punish-

Punishments upon the wicked and rebellious; and also, what may be expected in that State, which is expressly declared to be a State of Retribution.

This ought to be carefully attended to, & deeply impressed upon our Minds. And surely!

It highly concerns us to deal very impartially with ourselves, in searching & trying our Ways, & judging whether our State be such, as to render us the Objects of God's Favour & Approbation, or his Displeasure; & there are very plain Rules laid down for us in the Holy Scriptures, by which we may form this Judgement; and if we are in a State of Favour with God, may attain to comfortable Satisfaction concerning it. — But, should our deliberate and impartial Inquiries end in a Conviction, that our Moral-State is bad, and that we are not in Favour with God: What remaineth, in this Case, but immediate Repentance from dead Works, as the only thing, that can make an Alteration in our State, for the better? Repentance, by which is meant a real and thorough Change of the Temper & Life, from evil to good.

I shall Conclude the Whole, with the affecting Expressions of the Prophet Jeremiah, speaking in the Name of God, concerning the Part, which he acts, as the Governour of the World, & which, it especial-

ly becomes us to apply to our most serious Thoughts.

"Thus saith the Lord; let not the Wise-Man glorie in his Wisdom, neither let the Mighty-Man glorie in his Strength: let not the Rich-Man glorie in his Riches; but let him that glorieth, glorie in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord, that exercise Loving-Kindness, Judgement, and Righteousness, in the Earth; for in these things, I delight, saith the Lord."

SERMON XXII.

On the Happiness of God,

Rom. ix. 5. "God, blessed forever."

Since all Men naturally desire Happiness, it is but reasonable, (among our other Disquisitions,) to point-out the Fountain of it — Where it is to be found, & how to be attained by us, in that Degree in which Creatures are capable of it.

What Job says of Wisdom, may be also said of Happiness: "God understands the Way of it, he knoweth the place thereof."

He only, who is perfectly possessed of it himself, knows, wherein it consists, and what are the true Ingredients of it. So that,

To direct us in our Search after Happiness, the best Way will be, to contemplate and consider the Divine Nature, which is the only perfect Pattern & Idea of it, the original Fountain of all the Felicity that Creatures are capable of.

To this End, are the Words before us, in which
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the Apostle attributes this Perfection of Blessedness or Happiness to God, in an eternal Degree; "God, blessed for ever;"

In speaking to this Attribute, I shall propose these three things:

First, I shall show what we are to understand by the Happiness of God, and what are the essential Ingredients of it.

Secondly, That this Title belongs to God, (i.e.) that the Divine Nature is perfectly blessed & happy.

Thirdly, How far his Creatures are capable of Happiness, and by what Ways and Means we may be made partakers of it. — After which, I shall Conclude with a few Inferences from the whole. And,

First, I am to consider what we are to understand by the Happiness of God, and what are the essential Ingredients of it.

The Notion of Happiness, taken at the highest Sense, (as we must necessarily do, when we apply it to God,) is no other than a fixed and an immoveable State of Contentment and Satisfaction, of Pleasure and Delight, resulting from the secure Possession & Enjoyment of all that is good, great, and desirable,

(i.e.)

explained.

321

(us) of all Excellency & Perfection, so that these following Ingredients must be taken in to make up a perfect State of Happiness, (viz.)

First, Perfect Knowledge to understand what it is that constitutes Happiness, and to know when we are really possessed of it. For,

As he is not truly happy, who is so only in Imagination, without any real Foundation for it; so neither is he, who, tho he hath all other Ingredients of Happiness, yet only wanteth this, and doth not really think himself to be so. For, we often see, in the imperfect Felicity of this World, that Many, who have all the Materials and Circumstances of worldly Happiness in Possession; yet, from their unskillful Management of them, and from the Lightness and Injudiciousness of their Minds, not knowing when they are well, make an hard Shift to be miserable, in the midst of all these things. But,

God knows both what makes Happiness, and that He is perfectly possessed of it. Again.

To perfect Happiness is likewise required a full Power to do whatever conduceth to Happiness, & likewise to check and controul whatever would hinder or disturb it,

No Being, therefore, is as happy as it can be, who is not all-sufficient for these things, & hath not

Serm. XXII.

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within it's Power whatever is necessary to an happy Condition, whatever is necessary to secure and continue that Happiness against all Attempts and Accidents whatever. Again,

Another Ingredient of Happiness is Wisdom, to direct this Power, and to manage it in such a manner as may effectually conduce to this End. This is very different from mere abstract Power. For, we may have all the Materials of Happiness with us, and yet want the Wisdom and Skill to frame an happy Condition out of them.

He, therefore, is not properly happy, who doth not thoroughly understand the proper Method and Means of compassing and securing his own Happiness. Again,

Another most considerable and essential Ingredient of Happiness is Goodness, without which, as there can be no true Majesty or Greatness, so neither can there be any real Felicity or Happiness. Now, Goodness is a generous Disposition of Mind to communicate and diffuse itself, by making others Partakers of it's Happiness, in such Degrees as they are capable, and as Wisdom shall direct. For,

He is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the Pleasure of making others so, & of seeing them put into an happy Condition by his Means, which is

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the highest Pleasure, (I had almost said Pride, but I may truly say, Glory,) of a Good-Man, of a good and great Mind; for,

By such Communications of himself, an immense and an all-sufficient Being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his Power, but doth hereby rather enlarge and magnify the Excellency of his Being, and gives to itself great Ease and Delight, without the least Diminution of his own Power or Perfections. But further,

Perfect Happiness doth not only employ the Exercise of Goodness, but all other Virtues also, which are suitable to so perfect a Being. (i.e.) God doth nothing that is contrary to, or unbecoming his Holiness and Righteousness, his Truth and Faithfulness; for, if he did contrary to them in any Case, he would thereby create Disquiet to himself; for, this is a certain Rule, that nothing can act contrary to it's own Nature, without Reluctance and Displeasure.

This, therefore, we cannot imagine ever to befall so perfect and immutable a Being, as God is.

Again, Perfect Happiness implies in it a settled and secure Possession of all these Excellencies and Perfections; for, if any of them were liable to fail, or be diminished, so much would be diminished also from the perfect and complete Happiness of God.

If the Deity were subject to Change or Impairment of his Condition, so that either his Knowledge or Power, his Wisdom or Goodness, or any other of his Perfections could, in any way, decline or fall off, there would then be a proportionable Abatement of Happiness. And,

From all these result, Lastly, infinite Contentment, & Satisfaction, & Pleasure & Delight, which is the very Essence of Happiness. As,

First, infinite Contentment & Satisfaction in this Condition! and, well may Happiness be contented with itself, (i.e.) with such a Condition, that he that is possessed of it can neither desire it should be Better, nor have any Cause to fear it should be Worse.

Secondly, Pleasure and Delight, which is something more than Contentment; for, a man may be contented even under Affliction, and in such a Condition, as he may be far from taking any Pleasure or Delight in. "No Affliction, (as the Apostle says,) is joyous for the present, but grievous." But,

There cannot be perfect Happiness without Pleasure and Delight in our Condition. For,

Full Pleasure is a certain Mixture of Love & Joy, hard to be expressed in Words, but only and truly known by inward Sense and Experience.

Having

Having thus described, (according to our imperfect Conceptions and Expressions of God,) the Happiness of the Divine Nature, and wherein it consists: I shall proceed;

II. To show that this Perfection belongs to God, (i.e) that the Divine Nature is perfectly blessed and happy. He is "God, blessed forever."

This is so universal an Acknowledgement of Natural Light, that it would be a very superfluous Undertaking to manifest it with particular Citations from the Heathen Authors; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity "the most happy & the most perfect Being." Happy, because Felicity naturally results from Perfection. Indeed, So thoroughly were they convinced of this Attribute of the Deity, that Happiness was essential to God, that this was one of the Ways which they took to find out what Properties were fit to be attributed to God, & what not; to consider what Things were consistent with Happiness, or inconsistent with it; Whatever signified Happiness, and was a Perfection consistent with it, that they ascribed to God as a suitable Property of the Divine Nature; and whatever was otherwise, they removed from God, as unfit either to be said of, or applied to him. Indeed,

Whatever Differences there were among the Phi-

Philosophers concerning the Perfections of the God-head ; yet, they all agreed in the perfect Felicity of it ; indeed, even those who so boldly attempted to strip it of most of it's Perfections ; yet frequently own and profess to believe the Happiness of it.

The Happiness, then, of the Divine Nature was universally acknowledged. — Blessedness is a Perfection so inseparable from the Notion of a Deity, that whoever professes to believe a God, must acknowledge him to be perfectly happy, to be "God, blessed for ever."

As to the Testimonies of Scripture in the Case before us, they clearly evince this Perfection, as essentially belonging to God.

The Title of Blessedness is frequently given to God and Christ, as in St. Mark, where the High-Priest asketh our Saviour, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ?" And St. Paul, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, "The God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for evermore:" so likewise, in his Epistle to the Romans, "the Creator, blessed for evermore."

Which likewise is said of Christ in the text, "of whom Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" Again,

God is called "the blessed & happy God," "the blessed and only Potentate." It

It is certain, then, that Blessedness or Happiness is a Title belonging to God, which is a sufficient Foundation to the present Doctrine. But further,

Besides these Texts already produced, the Scripture doth every where, (by way of necessary Consequence,) declare the Happiness of the Divine Nature, (viz.) wherever it speaks of the Excellency and Perfection of his Being, of his Knowledge and Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and Righteousness; and of the Eternity and Unchangeableness of them; and of the infinite Delight and Complacency which he takes in their Enjoyment.

Having thus shewn the Nature, and established the Doctrine before us, I shall now proceed,

Thirdly, to see how far we his Creatures are capable of his Happiness, and the Ways by which we may be made Partakers of it.

We are not capable of absolute & perfect Happiness, because that results only from infinite Perfection, & which is no where to be found but in God. It remains, therefore, that Creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite & limited Degree, by a Resemblance to God, and by the Enjoyment of him; by being like to him, thus qualifying themselves for his present, and future Favour.

As we are Creatures of a finite Power, limited Understandings, and a mutable Nature, we necessarily want many of these Perfections which are the Cause and Ingredients of perfect Felicity.

We are far from being sufficient for our own Happiness: we are not so of ourselves, nor can we make ourselves so, by our own Power; for neither are we Wise-enough for our own Direction, nor Good-enough for our own Satisfaction.

All the Happiness we are capable of, is by Communication from Him, who is the Original and Fountain of it; by our being made Partakers of the Divine Nature, (as St. Peter speaks,) by our Resemblance of God in those Perfections which are the most essential Ingredients of Happiness, (viz.) his Goodness and Righteousness, his Truth and Holiness, & the like. These do immediately qualify us for the Favour of God, and the Friendship of the Almighty, and for the blessed Sight and Enjoyment of him; not to add, the immediate happy Effects of these good Dispositions to us, in the present Peace, Serenity, and Satisfaction of our own Minds, together with the Advantage, Honour, and Credit which they do immediately give us.

The Means, then, to obtain Happiness, can only be found in the Way of Righteousness; & to be made
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Partakers of the Blessedness of God, is, to "do the things which he says; — "Blessed are they who do the Commandments, for they only have a Right to the Tree of Life." Now,

The Favour of God, and the Light of his Countenance upon us, his Friendship and Good-Will towards us, which can only be obtained by Obedience through Faith; these do supply all the Defects of Power and Wisdom in us, for God being our Friend, we have then an Interest in all his Perfections, & a Security, that, (as Occasion requires,) they will all be employed for our Benefit and Advantage; so that, though we are "weak in ourselves," yet are we "strong in the Lord, & in the Power of his Might" and are "able to do all things, through him strengthening us;" — tho' in ourselves we are defective in all these things, yet we may have free Recourse to the Fountain of Life, and "ask of God, who giveth to all Men liberally, & uphraideth not." And,

It is next to the having these Perfections in ourselves, to know where to have them for asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our Happiness. So that,

Tho our Happiness depends upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourselves for it, (& God is always ready to assist us by his Grace to this pur-

Serm. XXII.

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pose,) it is really, and in Effect, in our own Power; and we are altogether as safe and happy in God's Care and Protection of us, as tho we were "sufficient of ourselves for these things." However,

This is the highest Happiness that the Condition of a Creature is capable of, (viz) to have all our Defects so liberally supplied by the Bounty of another, to have a free Recourse to the Fountain of Happiness, & at last be admitted to the blessed Sight and Enjoyment of Him, "in whose Presence there is Fulness of Joy, and at whose Right-Hand there are Pleasures forevermore. But,

Lastly, I am to see what Inferences can be made from what hath been thus laid-down. And,

First. Is God forever happy? And, Is our Happiness only derived from Him? Then,

This shows that Atheism or Infidelity is altogether melancholy and disconsolate; in as much as it takes-away the Fountain and only Foundation of Happiness, and the only perfect Pattern of it: - inasmuch as it endeavours, at once, to extinguish the Being of God, and all the Life & Comfort of Mankind; so that we could neither form any Idea of Happiness, or have a Possibility of obtaining it.

For, It is evident that we are not sufficient for it of ourselves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing then that can make us so. "God

"God is the true Light of the World," and a thousand Times more necessary to the Comfort & Happiness of Mankind than the Sun itself, which is but a dark Shadow or faint Resemblance of that infinitely more bright and glorious Being. "the happy & only Potentate, who only hath Immortality, dwelling in that Light, which no man can approach unto, whom no Man hath seen, nor can see," (i.e) in this mortal State.

So that the greatest Enemies, and most injurious of all others to Mankind, are those who would banish the Belief of a God out of the World, and his happy Presence from among us; because, this is to "lay the Axe to the Root of Tree," & at one Stroke to fell the whole Superstructure, & cut-off all Hopes of Happiness from Mankind. So that he is a "Fool, indeed, who says, in his Heart, there is no God."

Secondly, If the Divine Nature be so infinitely & compleatly happy, this is a great Confirmation of our Faith and Hope concerning the Happiness of another Life, which the Scripture describes to us by the Sight & Enjoyment of God, & by a Similitude unto Him, seeing "as He is, so shall we also be," according to our Capacity. — As we are Creatures, we are not capable of Happiness absolute & infinitely perfect, because our Nature is but finite & limited :

Serm. XXII.

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But, "the Blessed God," who is infinitely happy himself, can also make us happy according to our finite Measure and Capacity. For,

As He, who is the first and original Being, can communicate Being to others, so also He, who is the Fountain of Happiness, can convey suitable Happiness to his Creatures.

This is altogether credible, because the Happiness of God himself consists in that Propensity which rejoiceth in Profusion of Goodness, overflowing for the Happiness of others. Indeed,

If there can be any Accession to that which is infinite, God himself finds a new Pleasure and Felicity in the Communication of his Goodness to his Creatures, and therefore he is represented in Scripture as glad of the Conversion of a Sinner, because by it he becomes capable of the Happiness which God designed for the Benefit of his Creatures, and which he is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they become meet, and are qualified for it; which only by Obedience, through Faith, they can be.

So that the Goodness of God is the great Foundation of all our Hopes, and the firmest Ground of our Assurance of a blessed Immortality. It is Happiness to the Divine Nature to communicate itself, and the Communications of God's Goodness is Happiness

piness to us; and therefore, both for our Example and Encouragement, the Goodness of God ought always to be represented to the greatest Advantage; and we should endeavour to possess our Minds with the most firm Belief and Persuasion of it. But,

Thirdly, from what hath been said concerning the Happiness of the Divine Nature, we may learn wherein our own Happiness consists, (viz.) in the Image, and in the Favour of God; - In the Favour of God, as the Cause of it; - and, In the Image of God, as a necessary, inward Disposition, and Qualification for it. (A)

Unless God love us, we cannot be happy; and "a wicked Person, (we know,) is vile in his eyes; but the Righteous are his delight." - "The righteous Lord loveth Righteousness." - "He is not a God that hath Pleasure in Wickedness, neither shall any Evil dwell with him." - "The wicked shall not stand in his Sight, for he hateth all the workers of Iniquity." Indeed,

If we could suppose that God takes Pleasure in any

(A) God's Glory, and our Happiness are so inseparably united, that we cannot aim right at either, but we must hit Both; for, God has not, throughout all his Creation, an Ensign of Honour so truly worthy of him, as that of a divine and pious Soul, that reflects his Image, and shines back his own Glories upon him.

Serm. XXII.

any Person that is unlike to him, (which is impossible,) yet that Person could not be happy, because he would want that inward Frame and Disposition of Mind, which is necessary to Happiness; for,

The very same Causes & Ingredients which make up the Happiness of God, must, in an inferior Degree, be found in us also, otherwise we cannot be happy. (A)

A wicked Man, wheresoever he goes, hath a Root of Gall and Bitterness within him, and therefore, is, and must be, miserable from himself; Indeed,

There is a certain Temper and Disposition of mind that is necessary and essential to Happiness, (viz.) Holiness and Godliness, which is the Nature of God; and so far as any one departs from this Temper, so far he removes himself from Happiness.

As the Divine Nature, therefore, is the only perfect Idea of Happiness, so nothing less than our Conformity to it, can make us capable of it; for,

'Tis

(A) Happiness is not only a Freedom from Diseases and Pains of the Body, but from Anxiety and Vexation of Spirit; not only to enjoy the Pleasures of Sense, but Peace of Conscience and inward Tranquility: And this Happiness, so suitable to the Immortality of our Souls, & the eternal State we must live in, is only to be met-with in Religion.

Human Happiness is founded upon Wisdom and Virtue. — There can be no Happiness without Virtue. — “A Good-Man shall be satisfied from himself.” — A good Man can never be miserable, nor a wicked Man happy. Indeed, Happiness doth as naturally flow from a reasonable, (i.e) a virtuous and regular Conduct, as Light from the Sun.

'Tis not the Place, but Conformity of Temper,
that causeth reciprocal Pleasure.

This Argument plainly convinceth Men of the
Necessity of Holiness and Goodness, and all other
Virtues, in order to our present, as well as future
Welfare.

The Author and Fountain of Happiness, He who
made us, & alone can make us happy, cannot, (ac-
cording to the Terms of the Gospel, & without con-
tradicting the essential Purity of his own Nature,)
make us so, in any other way, than by planting in
us such a Disposition of Mind as is, (in Truth,) a
Participation of the Divine Nature, and by enduing
us, with our own Concurrence, with such Qualities
as are the necessary Materials & Ingredients of Hap-
piness. Indeed, there is no way to partake of the
Felicity of "God, blessed for ever," but by becom-
ing holy, righteous and good, as he is.

All Men naturally desire Happiness, but thro the
Folly and Perverseness of their Nature, they seek it
"in barren and desolate Places," where it never was,
nor ever can be found.

"Many will say, Lo here, or Lo there!" that Hap-
piness is in the Enjoyment of sensual Pleasures and
Delight; but believe them not; Happiness is some-
thing that is nearer and more intimate to us, than

Serm. XXII.

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any of the things of this World ; it is within us , in our Heart, and in the very inward Frame and Disposition of our Soul , founded in Peaceableness and Purity, (A) whose Effects are "Quietness and Rest, and Assurance for ever." In a Word,

If ever we would be happy , we must be like the blessed God ; we must be holy & merciful, good & just, as He is ; & then we are secure of his Favour ; for, "the righteous Lord loveth Righteousness, his Countenance will behold the Upright."

Upon the Whole : The surest Foundation of Love & Friendship with God, is, (as we have seen,) our Similitude of Temper and Disposition to him. God and Man must, in some Measure, be like one another, before they can take reciprocal Pleasure.

If, therefore, we be unlike to God , it is , (in the Nature of the thing ,) impossible that we should be happy.

There must, then, be a Change either in God or Us, to bring-about this Likeness . Now, The Nature of God is inflexible, fixed and immutable ; the Change , consequently , must be in us ; we must change

(A) "Felicity is not in the Veins of the Earth, where we dig for Gold ; nor in the Bottom of the Sea, where we seek for Pearl, but in a pure and virtuous Mind."

change ourselves, and endeavour to be like God, whose Nature so wholly tends to Goodness, that we may enjoy Happiness. For,

Since God cannot depart from his Holiness and Purity, (the blessed Perfections of his Nature,) we must, therefore, leave our Sins, and be holy, as he is holy, if ever we hope to be happy, as he is happy.

"Every man, then, that hath this Hope in him, will purify himself, even as God is pure, that he may finally be happy, even as God also is."

SERMON XXII.

Of the Omnipotence of God.

Psalm cxlvii. 5. "Great is our Lord, and great is his Power."

We now where, among the divine Compositions, meet with so many exalted Expressions of the Perfections of the Most-High, as in that part of the Scriptures from whence these Words are taken.

The Holy Psalmist, in high Strains; almost in every place, speaking-forth the Praises of the Lord, in Declarations of his Glory, his Nature, & Perfections.

In the Verse before us we have a magnificent Description of two of the divine Attributes of the great & eternal God, his Omnipotence, & Wisdom.

"Great is our Lord, and great is his Power; yea, and his Wisdom is infinite."

In the former of these, the Psalmist, indeed, doth not expressly declare the Summit of God's Omnipotence, but only that it is great: — "Great is his Power." But,

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According to the Intention, the Form & Figure of Expression, it is the stronger for being so expressed.

The Form is by no Means ordinary; or of light Significance; but of the highest Import, & strongest Asseveration possible, of the Attribute before us.

It was in the highest View possible with Man, that the Psalmist beheld the Glory of the Lord, and the Greatness of his Power; he was unable to express the Height & Extent, & Greatness of it; & therefore, in Rapture, exclaims with Wonder & Amazement, that "Great is our Lord, and great is his Power!"

My Design, then, from these Words, is, to ground on them the Attribute of God's Omnipotence, and to shew that Power belongs to God; (i.e) that the Excellency of Power, Power in it's highest Degree and Perfection: "All Power belongs to God;" (i.e) that Omnipotence is a Property, or Perfection of the Divine Nature.

For the more full and profitable Illustration of this Point, I shall shew,

First, The due Import of the Phrase, what we are to understand by it. And then,

Secondly, Prove that this Perfection belongs to God, after which I shall,

Serm. XXIII.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, In the last place, make such Inferences from the whole, as shall reasonably flow from the same. And,

First, Of the Omnipotence of God, and that he is Almighty.

The Word Almighty, from the Original, is usually distinguished to signify both the OPERATIVE Power of God, by which he can do all things, consistent with his Glory, as he himself pleases; as also the AUTHORITATIVE Power of God, by which he doth rule and govern the World, and whatsoever he hath made. Again,

It is also rendered, One who is All-sufficient, as being able to make-good all his Promises, and give all Blessings to his faithful Servants, he being the Original of all Power; there being none but what is derived from him, whom no Power can resist, and with whom all things are possible, the doing of which may argue Perfection; and which doth not imply a Contradiction, either in the things themselves, or to the Nature and Perfection of the Doer of them; a Limitation in which would be a Limitation in his Essence, since Weakness is an Imperfection in Nature, and without which all his other Perfections would be insignificant: — And, of this we have most clear Manifestations in those his stupendous Works

Works of Creation, Providence, and Redemption; wherein, whosoever will but "regard the Work of the Lord; & consider the Operations of his Hands," will acknowledge, (with the Psalmist,) that "Power belongeth unto him," and will hence be induced to dread, obey, and trust in him, "who is able to do exceedingly above all that we can either ask or think." But,

That we may more fully understand the Import of this, I shall consider it,

First, as to the Principle; and then,

Secondly, as to the Exercise of it.

As to the Principle, it is an Ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks Power & Perfection.

A Being that is Omnipotent is a perfect active Being, which can do all things in the most perfect Manner; can do all things at Once, in an Instant, & that with Ease: - As, - "Let there be Light, and there was Light." - "He spake the Word, and it was done." - "He commanded, and it stood-fast." - "At his Word the Winds and the Sea obey him." (A)

This

(A) The Perfection of God's supreme Power is displayed in the Manner of his Operation, which is not like that of finite active Beings, gradual and successive, painful and laborious; but his Work is easy to

Serm. XXIII.

him

This is the most perfect way of Acting that can be imagined, which the Scripture seems particularly to express to us, when it represents God as "making all things by his Word," and "upholding all things by the Word of his Power," as if there was nothing more required to the doing of any thing but an express Act of the divine Will. — "He spake the Word, and it was done."

As to the Extent of this Principle, it hath no Bounds. It extends beyond our finite and limited Conceptions: (i.e) when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a Manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the Perfection of it: but that beyond this it can still do many things more than we can imagine, and in a much more perfect Manner than we can conceive. (A)

This

him, & is irresistible by any opposite Strength: His Counsels are fulfilled only by determining them to be done. From whence it appears, that we cannot think too-highly of the Power of God, which is absolute; and therefore, properly called *Almighty*, since to it the whole World, and all things in it, owe their Rise and different Degrees of Perfections: For, no Reason can be assigned why any thing within the Bounds of Possibility, should not be if God pleases, seeing it requires no more Power to produce, than has been actually manifested in the Production of that which does exist.

(A) The Principle itself, the almighty Power of God, (by which can be meant nothing else but his infinitely active Nature,) is too high for

This is the Omnipotence of God as to the Principle, without either Bounds or Limits. But,

Secondly, As to the Exercise of it, it is only limited by the divine Will and Wisdom.

The divine Will determines it to it's Exercise, & the divine Wisdom directs & regulates it, (i.e.) God exercises his Power willingly; but not of Necessity, and in such a Manner, for the producing of such Effects, and in such Order to it, as to his Wisdom seems best. — Hence he is said to “act all things according to his good Pleasure,” and “according to the Council of his Will,” (i.e.) freely and wisely.

As

for us to understand. All the Idea we can have of it, is, by it's Operations, which is inadequate; but it represents the Object to our Minds as very great; since the Effects, by which we form it, even those of them which fall within our own particular Knowledge, are so many and wonderful. All things that are in the Universe, (the First Cause himself only excepted,) are his Works, and all Power is derived from him. Now, If the Effects vastly transcend the Capacity of the human Mind, how can it, by searching, find out the Cause? If we cannot reach to the utmost Limits of created Nature, nor comprehend the Productions of the Divine Power, how shall we comprehend the Power itself, which must be supposed to be far superior to them?

What Pretence can there be for denying, or doubting that he can do whatever pleaseth him, “Who made the Heavens and all the Host of them, the Earth and all things that are therein, the Sea and all that therein is; and who preserveth them all?”

Serm. XXIII.

As to the Extent of this Power, (as already observed,) it is an Ability to do all things that are consistent with itself, and with the Nature and Perfections of God.

Some things, indeed, there are, which the Scripture saith God cannot do: but, this is not from Want of Power, but of Will; not from Deficiency of Power, but from the Plenitude of his Perfections, or by Reason of their Contrariety to it. For instance,

'Some things there are which God cannot do, not for Want of Power to do them, but because his Word and Promise have restrained the Execution of them, or because they imply something of natural or moral Imperfection in them. (A)

God

(A) When it is said that the Power of God is infinite, the Meaning is, not that it reaches beyond Possibility, or extends to the doing of what is in itself impossible (i.e) that implies a Contradiction.

Not that we should call things impossible, or pretend to judge that the Power of God cannot produce them, merely because we cannot comprehend, or have any Idea at all of the Manner of Operation; But, where there is an apparent Inconsistency in the Idea of the Effect, so that one part of it necessarily destroys the other, This is not the Object of Power.

To say that by the Power of God, a Thing may be, and not be, at the same time; - that a Whole may be no greater than One of it's Parts; - that Number & Magnitude may be at once equal & unequal; that Bodies, (contrary to their Nature,) may be without Solidity, or be in different Places at the same Time; - To say that these, and such-like

God is said not to be able to LIE, and that because he is Immortal.

It is impossible for God to LIE, and that because He is a God of Truth. He cannot deny himself.

The Words, CANNOT, OR, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, (in these & the like Expressions,) do not signify CANNOT in Point of Power, as if a Falschood was not as easily affirmed as a Truth; or as if any of God's Actions were necessary, in like Manner as his eternal and omnipresent Being or Knowledge is necessary:

But the Meaning is, that, consistently with his Character, he cannot; consistently with his Goodness, consistently with his Perfections, he cannot, either impose upon his Creatures; or do; or require to be done, any thing that is evil. (*)

The Sinners, & to engage them to break-off their Sins by Repentance, than is this Consideration, that by continuing

such-like Absurdities, may be effected by the Power of God, is only to set his Power in a ridiculous Light, & to destroy all the Foundations of Knowledge and Reason.

(*) As it is no Diminution of Power, not to be able to do things which are no Object of Power; so, in like Manner, it is no Diminution either of Power or Liberty, to have such a perfect and analterable Rectitude of Will, as never possibly to choose to do any thing inconsistent with That Rectitude.

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The like Manner of speaking we meet with in Mark, vi. 5. (compared with Matt. xiii. 58) "Jesus could do no mighty Works in his own Country, because of their Unbelief." And in Gen. God says to Lot; "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing, till thou come thither." Evidently, not for Want of Power; But, consistently with his present Purposes and Designs, consistently with his Rule and Method of acting; He could not do these things. — Again,

Some things there are, &c. (under) —

Some things there are which God cannot do, because they are not suitable to the Perfections of his Nature, his Honour, his Justice, & the fixed Rules of his Government. (A)

In this Sense the Prophet Habbakuk saith of God, that "He cannot BEHOLD INIQUITY, (i.e) with Approbation, or without great Detestation, by reason of the Contrariety it bears to the Purity of his Nature, and the Prescriptions of his Holy Will, and the Dishonour it doth to his Holy Name. Now,

What Thought can be more proper to awaken Sinners, & to engage them to break-off their Sins by Repentance, than is this Consideration, that by continuing

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Serm. XXIII.

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finning

Messengers of Allah, as usual, brought to me the news of the
 death of the King of Persia. I was very much surprised and
 asked the messengers of Allah: "Is it not the King of Persia?"
 They said: "Yes, it is the King of Persia." I then said: "Is it not
 the King of Persia?" They said: "Yes, it is the King of Persia."

(A) We ought not to ascribe to the Power of God any thing which is unworthy of his other Perfections, any thing which is inconsistent with the Wisdom or Moral-Rectitude and Goodness of his Nature; for, that is absurdly to set the Attributes of the Deity at Variance with each other, and to dishonour his true Character under the Pretence of magnifying his Power, which is but a part of it.

Serm. XXIII.

remaining in their evil Courses, they render it morally impossible even for Almighty Power to do them any Good, or even Goodness itself willing to show them any Favour. For,

Thus God speaks to his own People, "Behold my Hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: nor is mine Ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your Iniquities have separated between Me and You, and hid my Face from you, that I WILL NOT HEAR."

But then, they give an Edge to his Power, to fall upon them with the heaviest Strokes of his vindictive Justice, and render him willing to "make-bare his Arm, and make the Power of his Glory known," upon such Vessels of his Wrath, fitted for Destruction. — Upon the Whole,

This completing of the Sentence by supplying such Words as the SENSE necessarily requires, is what all Men always do in common Speech, and seldom or never mistake in so doing. But in reading of Scripture, Men are much more apt, either negligently or superstitiously, to content themselves with
first, from the Dictates of Natural Light; And,

Secondly, from Scripture, or divine Revelation.

Omnipotence is one of the first Perfections which Reason has taught Men to ascribe to the Supreme Being.

Being. We cannot avoid observing a great Diversity of Operations and Effects, and consequently a great Difference in the Degrees of Power: but, the highest Measure of this Perfection must belong to the first universal Cause. Indeed,

If there is One immense, necessarily-existing and eternal Spirit, the designing, original Author of all Appearances, and of all the Powers distinct from his own, in the Universe, his Power must be the greatest of all; — Indeed, the greatest, and the most absolute that can be. For, it must be sufficient for it's own Productions, & superior to all others which are derived from it. And! To suppose the Possibility of a greater, is to suppose that a superior Power may proceed from an inferior and insufficient Cause, or from nothing. Accordingly,

All those who have acknowledged the One supreme eternal Deity, have constantly agreed in attributing to him the Character which the God of Abraham claims for himself, that he is "Almighty." However they might differ in their Notions concerning his other Perfections, here they are unanimous. The Idea of Power always accompanied that of Divinity. The Prophet Isaiah, therefore, having asserted the Supremacy of the God of Israel, (which is proved from his wonderful Works,) reproaches the Heathen Idols with Weakness. He calls upon them to show

tinuing in their evil Courses, they render it morally impossible even for Almighty Power to do them any Good, or even Goodness itself willing to show them any Favour. For,

Thus God speaks to his own People, "Behold my Hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: nor is mine Ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your Iniquities have separated between Me and You, and with the BARE Words, without attending to the Sense and Scope of the Writer, and by that Means have founded unintelligible Opinions, upon Texts whose real Meaning is both rational and obvious."

The Doctrine before us, &c. (under) —

The Doctrine before us being thus explained, I shall proceed to confirm it, and to show,

II. That the Perfection of this Attribute belongs to God: For, "Great is our Lord, and great is his Power." And, This I shall do,

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their God-head by the Operations of their Power ; either "in doing Good or Evil ;" For , an impotent God is an Absurdity in the Opinion of all Men . But , if there be One independent God "from Everlasting , " on whom all things depend, there appears no colourable Pretence for denying that he is all-powerful.

That God, then, must of Necessity be Omnipotent is self-evident. For,

Since all Things in the Universe were made by him, and depend upon him for their very Being , & all the Powers of all things are derived from him, & must consequently be entirely subject to him , it is manifest that nothing can make any Difficulty or Resistance to the Execution of his Will ; and therefore, his Power must be absolutely infinite .

Where there is no Being , it is plain there can be no Power . Now , all things that are in the World have no other Being than what depends on God's Pleasure ; and consequently there cannot be in the Universe any Power against his.

This precarious Being , which all things derive from the mere Will of God , the Apostle elegantly describes, by his "calling those things which be not, as tho' they were ;" and the Unlimitedness of his Power over them may, (on the contrary,) be as truly

ly

ly described by his "looking on all things that are, as tho they were not." But further,

And to show that these things are agreeable to the common Reason of Mankind, it is observable, that this is One of the most usual Titles which the Heathens gave to their supreme Deity, "God, the very Best, and Greatest." (A) Next to his Goodness they placed his Greatness, which chiefly appears in his Power. Their Theology is crouded with this Doctrine; their Philosophers urge and demonstrate, and their Poets celebrate it; Indeed, they not only attributed "a great Power" to him, but an Omnipotence. "There is nothing, (say they,) which He cannot perform." And,

They were convinced of this from the following Particulars. As,

First, from those two great Instances & Expressions of his Power, Creation and Providence; for,

The Heathens generally acknowledged the making of the World, and the Preservation & Government of it, to be the Effects of Power, determined by Goodness, and regulated by Wisdom. Hence it was that they gave those Titles to God, of "Maker of all things, and Governor of the World." (B)

The

(A) *DEUS Optimus, Maximus.*

(B) *OPIFEX Rerum, et RECTOR Mundi.*

The wiser Heathens generally looked upon the vast Frame of Nature, this stately Fabrick of the World, and the upholding and preserving it, as an Argument of the divine and invisible Power.

So the Apostle tells us, "The invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things that are made, even his eternal Power and God-Head." But,

Creation, in a literal Sense, is not the principal and the most obvious Manifestation of God's Omnipotence: That which may be also, and is usually stiled Creation, and which by the clearest Evidence of Reason we know to be the Work of the Deity, is, The Disposing all things in the World into the regular Forms which we see, and framing them into vast and beautiful Systems; which, (comprehending an infinite Variety of Parts, all placed in the most exact Order, and all conspiring to make One harmonious Whole,) show not only the perfect Intelligence, but the Activity also of the great Author; and that He has an unlimited Command over universal Nature. — When we consider that "he telleth the Number of the Stars, and calleth them all by their Names;" — That "he covereth the Heavens with Clouds, preparing Rain for the Earth:" — That "he giveth Snow like Wool, and scattereth the Hoar-Frost like Ashes:" — That "he stretcheth-out the North over the empty Place, & hangeth

hangeth the Earth upon Nothing:" — That "he bindeth-up the Waters in his thick Cloud, and the Cloud is not rent under them:" — That "he hath measured the Waters in the Hollow of his Hand, & meted-out the Heavens with a Span, & comprehended the Dust of the Earth in a Measure, & weighed the Mountains in Scales, and the Hills in a Balance:"

When we consider all this, we must conclude that "Great is our Lord, and great is his Power." But, "These are only a Part of his Ways, for how little a Portion is heard of him, and the Thunder of his Voice who can understand!" For,

It is to be observed that the Power of a voluntary Agent must still be supposed Superior to all it's Effects; all his Strength is not exhausted in his Works, but the Virtue which produced them is sufficient to produce more. So that, though we knew all the Works of God, (which we do not,) we should not thereby be able to make a Judgement concerning the utmost Extent of his Power, which remains one undecaying Principle of Operation, sufficient for new Productions beyond what we can imagine: for, as "no Man hath searched-out the Mind of the Lord," so the Effects of the Divine Omnipotence, which actually exist in all the different Appearances

of the World, far surpass our Conceptions. (A)

"The

(A) It is one Advantage not unworthy of our Notice, which we have by the modern Improvements of Natural Philosophy, (viz) that by it our Idea of the Works of God is greatly enlarged.

Formerly, Men were used to think that this Earth is the only Habitation of Living-Creatures, except that the Angels, pure Spirits, who, requiring no such Place of Abode, stand in the immediate Presence of God, and surround his Throne in the Heavens. But,

Later and more accurate Observation has given Men reason to believe that other Bodies of a vast Magnitude, within the Solar-System, and of a Constitution not unlike that of our Globe, are also inhabited. — Why should we imagine that such stupenduous Orbs are made for nothing; but only to be very imperfectly discerned by Mankind? Is it not much more rational to think, that since they are fitted for Beings of a Constitution like ours, they are possessed by such; and that by their constant Rotations round their own Axis, and by their periodical Revolutions about the Sun, as their Center, they are illuminated and warmed by it in the same Manner the Earth is? Nor is it unlikely that the fixed Stars, (shining by their own unborrowed Light, at so prodigious a Distance from us that no Judgement can be made of it,) are the Centers of other Systems, each of them perhaps as large as this. And, how many there may be of them, and how remote from each other, as well as from us, no One of Mankind can pretend, with the least Degree of Probability, to conjecture. *(See Note (b) p: 291. Vol. 1.)*

These Speculations, which, in the main, seem to be just, being founded on Observation of the Magnitude & Distance of the Heavenly Bodies, & their visible Variations, tend to give us a very magnificent Idea of the Works and Power of God. How wonderful are they? How great is He! "Worthy to receive Glory and Honour, who hath created all these things for his good Pleasure," Who hath raised Worlds above Worlds, far beyond the Reach of Human Knowledge, all of them stocked with proper Inhabitants, qualified to understand and admire his Perfections displayed in them, and to show-forth his Praise for them!

"The Everlasting God, the Creator of Heaven & Earth, fainteth not, nor is weary." - "His Hand is not shortned," nor has his Strength suffered any Abatement by all he has done. It is impossible for us to imagine what Works of the same, or different Kinds he is able to produce.

One Thing we are sure of, and it gives us a very awful Idea of his Omnipotence, that he can destroy his own Works; for, the Power which has made, is sufficient to unmake; & the Beings which owe their Existence originally to him, must cease to be at his Pleasure. He can unhinge the whole Frame of Nature, & dissolve the great Systems which his Power has raised.

It is not so easy for human Force to demolish the Fabricks, which, with great Labour, were erected, as for Omnipotence to reduce the Heavens and the Earth to their original Chaos; for they can none of them make the least Resistance to his Will.

Thus the Scripture elegantly describes the sovereign Dominion of Almighty God over the World, and his Power to remove those parts of it, which seem to be built on the most stable Foundation; "He removeth the Mountains, and they know it not;" "The Mountains quake before him;" - "If he do but touch the Hills they smoke;" yea, "the Hills and the Earth melt at his Presence."

So that if the whole World is not involved in Confusion, and the Frame of Nature does not suffer an universal Dissolution, it does not proceed from any Defect of Power in God, but from the Plenitude of his Perfection in Wisdom & Goodness.

This leads me to consider further,

The Manifestation of the Power of God in Preserving his Creatures.

As the Creation declares unto us the Power of God; So here again, What View have we of the Deity, in Reference to the Attribute before us!

Let us reflect a Moment on the ten Thousand, & ten thousand Times ten thousand Beings now in Existence, and all dependent upon, superintended, governed and preserved by the Deity, and we shall be filled with Amazement and Adoration.

The whole Universe subsists by the Word of his Power, & all the parts of it, with their various Motions and Changes, are so directed by his mighty Providence, as to answer the Ends for which they were made.

Sometimes, indeed, God acts against the common Course of Nature, by which he manifestes his Power, to awaken the Attention of Men by an extraordinary Interposition, in order to excite them to their Duty.

OF

Of which Sort we have many Instances recited both in the Old and New Testament.

'Tis true, indeed, we cannot be absolutely certain from the Nature of the things themselves, that they are all the peculiar Works of Omnipotence:

How far the Capacity of inferior, unseen Agents may reach, or what power they may have, by divine Permission, over what is commonly call'd the Course of Nature, we know not. But this we are sure of, That there is One eternal King, "whose Throne is prepared in Heaven;" and, that "his Kingdom ruleth over all," who is the Fountain of all Power and Authority. And, If his Minist'ring Spirits are able to effect such Prodigies, as are astonishing to us, This heightens, instead of lessening our Idea of his Majesty; since the highest of them are under his Command, and absolutely subject to his Disposal, and holding their Powers, and the very Foundation of them, (their Being,) by no other Tenure than his free Gift. But,

Secondly, God must, of Necessity, be Omnipotent, because all his other Perfections without this, would be insignificant and ineffectual.

Without this, Goodness would be an empty Name; Knowledge an idle Speculation; and Wisdom

don to contrive, without Power to execute, would be an endless thing.

There would be no such thing as Justice, if the Divine Nature were without Power to reward or punish. — There could be no such thing as Faithfulness, if he had not a Power to perform what he promises; Nor, indeed, any such thing as Providence: for, it would be in vain for him that hath no Power to take upon him to govern, or even intermeddle in the Affairs of the World.

Thirdly, Without this, there can be no Religion. For, tho all the divine Perfections concur in exciting religious Dispositions; and, (taken-together,) form that amiable Character, which is the Object of our devout Affections; yet, the Consideration of Almighty Power, in a particular manner, strikes the Mind with Awe, and produces that Fear which is the Security of our Obedience. Indeed,

If we take-away the Power of God, there will then be no Foundation for Faith and Trust. All Arguments from Hope and Fear would also be taken-away. We could not expect any Good, nor fear any Harm from an impotent God, that could do nothing. — The Sanction of God's Laws would be void also; for, to give Authority to Laws, there must not only be a Right to command, but Power also

to

to back those Commands; The grand Security of all, is Power; "that there is One Law-Giver, who is able both to save and to destroy." (A)

Men would not pray to God, nor make any Addresses to him, if they did not believe that he was able to supply all their Wants, and relieve them in all their Necessities. Indeed,

There would be no Encouragement for Men to serve God, if they did not believe that he was able to reward them for all their obedient Services, & bring them to Happiness, and to defend them against all the Enemies of their Welfare. — So evidently do all the Foundations of practical Religion depend upon our Assurance of this Attribute of God. But,

II. I am to prove this also from Scripture, or divine Revelation.

Notwithstanding the many & convincing Proofs of Reason in the Case before us, it is our Happiness to have "a more sure Word of Prophecy" in this & every other Case, (whether of Duty or Instruction,) "whereunto we shall do-well always to resort."

The Scripture is full of Expressions to this purpose, styling "God the Lord, strong and mighty" — "So

(A) Authority is the main Point of all Government.

Serm. XXIII.

— "So girt with Power!" — "The mighty God." —
 "Thine is the Greatness and the Power." — Thine
 is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory."
 — "He is mighty in Strength, & excellent in Pow-
 er, who is like unto him?" — "In the Lord Jeho-
 vah is everlasting Strength." Again,

"With God all things are possible." — "Thou
 canst do all Things." — "There is nothing too hard
 for Thee."

"Great, then, is our Lord, & great is his Power,
 yea, and his Strength is infinite." Indeed,

The Truth of this Attribute of the divine Omni-
 potence, ("that mighty Working whereby he is able
 to subdue all things to himself,") is so evident to
 the common Reason of Mankind, and so agreeable
 to the constant Tenor of Holy Writ, that we need
 not so much seek for Arguments to prove & demon-
 strate it's Reality, as we ought to endeavour to give
 lively and affecting Descriptions of it, and such as
 may be proper to fill our Minds with a just Sense of
 the supreme Majesty of God, and to excite in us, ac-
 cordingly, Resolutions of Obedience to him.

Such Descriptions as these the Scripture frequent-
 ly gives us of the Power of God, great & moving,
 and such as are naturally apt to produce in us the
 profoundest Humility towards him. As,

"He is Wise in Heart, and Mighty in Strength;
 "Who

Who hath hardened himself against him and prospered? - Which removeth the Mountains & they know it not, Which over-turneth them in his Anger; Which shaketh the Earth out of her place, & the Pillars thereof tremble; - He commandeth the Sun and it riseth not, and scaleth up the Stars: - The Pillars of Heaven tremble, and are astonished at his Reproof; - He divideth the Sea with his Power, and by his Understanding he smiteth thro the Proud: - He rebuketh the Sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the Rivers. - The Mountains quake at him, and the Hills melt, and the Earth is burnt at his Presence: - "Which alone spreadeth out the Heavens, and treadeth upon the Waves of the Sea; - Which doth great things past finding out, and Wonders without Number."

Thus holy Job. So likewise the eloquent Prophet Isaiah.

"The Lord of Host hath purposed; and who shall disannul it? - His Hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Again,

"Who hath measured the Waters in the Hollow of his Hand, and meted-out the Heavens with a Span, and comprehended the Dust of the Earth in a Measure, and weighed the Mountains in Scales, and the Hills in a Balance:?" - "Who hath directed

Serm. XXIII.

the

the Spirit of the Lord; or, (being his Counsellor,) hath taught him?" "Behold, the Nations are as a Drop of a Bucket, and are counted as the small Dust of the Balance; Behold he taketh up the Isles as a very little thing." Again,

"All Nations before him are as Nothing, & they are counted to him less than Nothing & Vanity."

"To whom, then, will ye liken God, or what Likeness will ye compare unto him?"

To mention but these passages more from Daniel.

"He that liveth for ever and ever, whose Dominion is an everlasting Dominion, and his Kingdom from Generation to Generation." "He doth according to his Will in the Armies of Heaven, & among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?"

"Lo, these are a part of his Ways, but how little a Portion is heard of him; and the Thunder of his Voice, who can understand?"

These are lively Descriptions of arbitrary Power indeed; Arbitrary, not in the Sense that the Tyrants of the World have occasioned it, (A) when it signifies

(A) Men may possibly imagine, that what they call Arbitrary Power, is a most exalted and glorious Condition; judging not by any real Perfection in the thing itself; but only by the Distinction and Superiority which it gives them above others.

If

Power of doing unreasonable & unjust things;
a Power of acting according to mere Will & Pleasure, without Right or Reason; but, in God, arbitrary or irresistible only.

Tho' it is a Power of doing all things absolutely

If by Arbitrary Power be meant that which is independent & liable to no Controul from without, in this Sense it belongs to the Almighty. But, if it signifies a Power of acting according to mere Will and Pleasure, without any Regard to Right and Reason, - This is so far from being an Excellency, (however it may be deemed by weak and ambitious Mortals,) that nothing can appear more deformed & odious to the unbiassed human Mind.

Can any man, (calmly considering, and not under the Influence of Passion,) think brutal Force amiable, (i.e. Force separated from Reason, Equity and Goodness? Rather, does it not fill the Mind with Horror?

If we compare human Governments of these directly opposite Characters; the One limited by Law and Justice, where the Rights of Subjects are secured on the same equitable Foundation with the Privilege of the Prince, and equally safe from violent Invasion: The Other wholly despotic, where the Lives, Liberties and Estates of Men are absolutely subject to the Caprice of a passionate Individual; accustomed to tyrannical Cruelty, and flattered into an Opinion, that it is the highest Glory, of which the human Nature is capable.

Upon such a Comparison, it will be easy to determine whether Arbitrary Power, in the Sense already explained, be a real Perfection in the Esteem of intelligent Beings.

Far be it from us to entertain any such Notions of the divine Dominion, which, tho' it be absolutely uncontrollable, (i.e. cannot be resisted by any opposite Strength, (for, "who can stay his Hand, or say unto him, What dost Thou?") Yet is always attended with perfect Wisdom and Moral Rectitude.

without Control; yet, at the same time, there is necessarily and inseparably connected with it, an Idea of Infinite Reason, and Wisdom, and Goodness.

God's acting according to his Supreme Will and Pleasure does not signify, as it does among corrupt Men, acting according to Will & Inclination without Reason; but, (on the contrary,) his acting always according to that Will, which is influenced by nothing but by the most perfect Reason. (A)

The Proposition before us being thus confirmed, I shall now,

Lastly, see what Improvements can be made from it. And,

First, For the Information of our Judgements. Hereby we may be confirmed in the Truth of Christ's Divinity. For,

Since the Work of Creation is frequently ascribed to Christ; seeing "all things are said to be made"

(A) Men are Tyrants because they are impotent; a secret Consciousness of dependent, precarious Power, and a misgiving Fear of Harm from others, whom their Passions represent as formidable Enemies, put them upon exerting their utmost Ability in executing their Will without Delay. But, He, who is secure in his unchangeable All-sufficiency, absolutely independent, and therefore incapable of Fear from any adverse Power, or of any other Passion which terminates in Self-Defence, can never be tempted to act otherwise than according to the most perfect Wisdom, Rectitude and Goodness.

made by him," and "nothing to be made without him;" and since the framing of the World is said to be a clear & perfect Demonstration of "the eternal Power and God-Head" of the Creator of it, this must be a convincing Proof of the eternal Power and God-Head of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

Secondly, Hence also it is that we are confirmed in the Notion of the All-Sufficiency of God; (i:e) that he wants not any thing besides himself to make him happy; he being "God, blessed for ever more." He was God, infinitely happy before any of his Creatures had a Being, and therefore must be so, should they cease to be. Hence therefore,

Thirdly, It must follow that God cannot act for Self-Advantage, or seek any other End in laying his Commands upon us, besides the Welfare of Mankind. For,

He who is infinite in Wisdom, cannot be deemed to design that which we are incapable to give, or He to receive. And!

What can be more powerful to move us to a free Compliance with his holy Will, than is this Consideration, that he designs our Welfare by all the Service that he requires from us, and intends it wholly for our good.

Serm. XXIII. What

What I have farther to add under the Subject of the present Discourse, (by way of Inference,) shall be for the Reformation of our Lives. And here,

The present Consideration is so full to the Purpose, that we cannot fail, (if we observe it,) but be obedient to the Will of God; and improve it to a sincere, exact, and conscientious Performance of our Duty, both to God and Man.

This was the Improvement which God required Abraham to make of it: "I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect."

What we render walking with, or before God, the Original more significantly renders "doing what is well-pleasing in his Sight." Thus "Enoch walked with God;" (i.e) he did what was well-pleasing to him; - And several such-like Instances.

This Interpretation is confirmed by St. Paul's Saying of Enoch, that "he pleased God:" Whence we may learn that when the Consideration of the Almighty Power of God, (before whom we still are,) engages us sincerely to endeavour to do what is well-pleasing in his Sight, then are we perfect in the Sense of Scripture, and divine Construction.

We must labour, then, as becomes those, for whom God hath promised that he will engage and employ his Omnipotence for their good.

If

"If we hope for any good from the Almighty, we must "walk before him, and be perfect;" for, good Men alone have a peculiar Interest in Gbd's Power and Protection; for, "with the pure only will he show himself pure;" And, "without Holiness, no Man shall see the Lord." But,

Secondly, The Consideration of God's Almighty Power is a strong Motive to the Fear of God; which, when it is effectually implanted in our Hearts, will exceedingly engage us to depart from all Iniquity.

The Power of the greatest Man can only reach to our Bodies and Estates; and yet it so far over-awes us, that we dare not do what renders us subject to his Wrath. How much more, then, should we dread the Fury of his Anger; Who, when he hath destroyed the Body, can subject the Soul to eternal Punishment. It is our Saviour's Argument: "Fear not them who can kill the Body only, and after that can do nothing more: I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear Him, who, after he hath killed, hath Power also to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him."

All Fear ariseth from the Apprehension of some Evil, either destructive of, or burthensome to Nature, and which deprives us of something that is either

Serm. XXIII. ther

ther profitable or pleasant to enjoy : &c , the greater the Evil is, the greater also is, and will be, the Fear.

Now , that which can alleviate these Fears, is, either the Thoughts of being able by our own Strength, or by the Help of others, to resist, and avert the Evil from us. Or,

Secondly, that we may be able to bear it , or be supported under it; till,

Thirdly, We obtain Deliverance from it, or avoid it by concealing ourselves, and flying from the Hands of Justice; or else, by making Peace, and obtaining Pardon for the Offence committed.

And, He that seriously considers, and in his Heart is convinced, (as every rational man must be,) that he cannot possibly screen himself by any of these Means , cannot , (in any Reason,) still continue in, and venture on that Action, which will so certainly and inevitably expose him to eternal Destruction; and yet,

This is assuredly the Case of every Sinner, that wilfully, and against the Check and Convictions of his Conscience , goes-on in any Course of Sin and Disobedience to the Laws of God.

Seeing then, that we are only Enemies to God by wicked Works, we can only cease to be so, by "ceasing to do evil , and learning to do well."

Whilst

Whilst, therefore, we go on in our evil Ways, we go on to engage his Power against us.

What, therefore, remains, is, that we resolve immediately to search our Hearts, and try our Ways, and "turn them from our Iniquities to the Lord;" that so that Power, which will assuredly be engaged for the Destruction of the wilful and impenitent Sinner, may be employed for the Preservation of the returning Prodigal.

Thirdly, The Consideration hereof, as it creates the greatest Terror to the wicked, so it affords the highest Comfort to all pious Souls; because a God of infinite Holiness and Goodness, a God engaged by Promise, "to give Grace and Glory, & to withhold no good thing from them who lead a godly Life," must be both willing, & by his Word obliged to shew the highest Tokens of his Favour & Goodness towards them; and, a God of unlimited Power must be as able as he is willing to do the greatest Kindness for them.

This, therefore, is that which must administer Support unto them under all Distresses; for,

If no Power is so able to oppress them, as God is able to protect and deliver them, surely they can never want sufficient Ground to hope for Succour, "whose Help standeth in the Name of the Lord."

Serm. XXIII.

who

who hath made Heaven & Earth." We are hereby secure from all Evils that may befall us from the Hands of Men, as being sheltered by the Wing, & "kept under the Shadow of the Almighty."

The holy Psalmist mentions all the Evils that can at any time befall us, and doth assure all those, "who abide under the Shadow of the Almighty God," of Preservation from the Terrors of them; so that such Men may say, with much humble Confidence, "the Lord is on my Side, I will not fear what Man can do unto me."

Fourthly, The Consideration of God's Power may encourage us against the Fears of being over-powered by the Strength of Satan, or overcome by the inward Strength of our own Corruptions, provided we use a Christian Diligence to watch against their Motions and Assaults, & are as careful to provide against these spiritual, as we are to secure ourselves from our wordly Enemies.

This is our exceeding Comfort, that "the Divine Power, (as St. Peter saith,) doth afford us all things requisite to Life and Godliness."

This is our Comfort, that "if by well-doing we commit ourselves to the divine Protection, we shall be kept by the mighty Power of God, through Faith, unto Salvation." But further,

The

The Consideration of God's Almighty Power is an Encouragement to Prayer, a Motive to put up our Petitions with Faith, with full Expectations of a gracious Answer.

His Power being an Encouragement sufficient to silence all our Doubtings, "That God is able to do exceedingly above all that we can either ask or think." Hence, in that Form of Prayer, which Christ hath taught us, we say, grant, Lord, the Blessings we have asked, "for thine is the Power."

Again, This Consideration is further urged in Scripture, as a Motive to a free and generous Charity, without ignoble or distrustful Fears of wanting, in time to come, what we thus give to our Brethren, and by so doing, "lend unto the Lord." Again,

This Consideration of God's Omnipotence should check the Pride and vain Confidence of Men.

What have we to be proud of? — What have we that we have not received? Where then is Cause of Boasting? Who may glorie in his Sight? Those that have the greatest Power should remember from whence it is derived, and render back the Glory due to the Fountain of it. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, Glory and Strength; yea, give unto him his Glory due."

Lastly, We should make this Omnipotence of
Serm. XXIII. God

God the Object of our Trust and Confidence.

This is the most proper Use we can make of the Doctrine before us.

Holy David, when he magnifies God's Mercies, in delivering his People from the Multitude of their Enemies, resolves it into this; "Our Help standeth in the Name of the Lord, who hath made Heaven and Earth."

Thus did the great Pattern & Example of Faith encourage and support his Confidence in God in a very difficult Trial; "he staggered not at it, because he believed in God, who quickeneth the Dead, & calleth those things which be not, as though they were; therefore, against Hope he believed in Hope."

This gives Life to all our Devotion, to be assured that "God is able to do for us exceedingly above all that we can either ask or think;" and that "his is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, for ever."

There is something truly significant to the Purpose before us, in that Epithet of the Prophet Isaiah more fully to describe this Attribute of the Lord unto us, for his People's Defence: "In the Lord Jehovah is EVERLASTING Strength."

It is He only who is ETERNAL, in whom alone IMMORTAL Souls can find any true Ground of Confidence.

idence. — Whatever else we rest upon, or fly-to for Refuge, must be both unable and insufficient to be unto us a sure Ground of Confidence, as being both of a frail and fading Nature; & therefore, either apt to fail us, or fall away itself. We cannot trust in Men, because there is nothing in Man to be a Foundation of our Confidence.

His Good-Will towards us may change, his Power may faint, and he himself grow weary. Or,

If these continue, yet they that have both a Mind and a Power to help us, themselves may fail. The Psalmist, therefore, useth this Consideration of Men's Mortality, to take us off from any Confidence in them.

"Put no Trust in Princes, nor in any Child of Man, for there is no Help in him." And Isaiah, "Cease ye from Man, whose Breath is in his Nostrils; for, wherein is he to be accounted of?" The greatest of the Sons of Men being but as "lying Refuges to the everlasting God," & but as "broken Reeds to the Rock of Ages."

"Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the Ends of the Earth, fainteth nor, neither is weary?"

Having, therefore, such a Friend, whose Strength is everlasting, and who is of continued Omnipotence, whose Power, whose Love and Wisdom, are as eter-

nal as himself, how can the Soul that hath an Interest in him be disquieted with Fears that any Evil shall befall him, or any Blessing be wanting unto him? It is impossible; but he must trust in him at all times; "for, in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting Strength."

I have but one Caution to add in particular Relation to this, (viz) that if we would hope for any Good from the Almighty, we must be good ourselves; we must "walk before him, & be perfect;" since it is only good Men that have a peculiar Interest in God's Power and Protection.

Our Expectations, therefore, from the Omnipotence of God, must be with Submission to his Pleasure, & Goodness, and Wisdom; and we must endeavour to become such as those should be, for whom he has engaged to employ his Omnipotence.

We must not expect that God will manifest his Power just when we think there is Occasion for it, however unqualified we may be; but then only, when it seems best to him. - Upon capable Objects, he will so employ his Omnipotence, as will best shew forth both his Wisdom and Goodness, to our unspeakable Advantage: And,

With these Qualifications we may rely upon him, in all our Wants, both spiritual and temporal;
for,

for, his divine Power can "give us all things that pertain, and are requisite to Life and Godliness."

We may trust him at all times, for the Omnipotent "God neither slumbereth, nor sleepeth; The Almighty fainteth not, neither is weak."

"Trust ye in the Lord, then, with all your Hearts, and that for ever; for, in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting Strength."

"Unto him, therefore, who is able to do exceedingly above all that we can either ask or think, according to the Power that worketh in us; to Him be Glory in all Churches of the Saints, by Jesus Christ, forever.

Amen."

SERMON XXIV.
Of the Knowledge (A) of God.

I. John, iii. 20. "God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things."

"The Lord is a God of Knowledge, and by him Actions are weighed."

The Words before us signify to us the Knowledge of God, and that he is eminently possessed of it; being in this, great above all.

"God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things." — Which Words, as of themselves they confirm to us the Attribute of God's Omniscience; so, if considered with Relation to the Context, are a powerful Motive to engage us to use our utmost

(A) The Transposition of this Discourse from the place it stood in the First Edition, is occasioned by the antecedent Necessity of Knowledge before Wisdom. — We must necessarily know before we can be wise to contrive.

The Transposition of other Discourses also, on the Attributes, from the Order of the First Edition, appear'd necessary, as distinguishing them, (according to the present Mode,) into *Natural* and *Moral*.

utmost Endeavours so to demean ourselves before him, that, upon a serious Review of our Actions & Deportment both towards God & Man, we may not be condemned by the inward Testimony of our own Conscience. "For, if our Heart condemn us, God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things."

So that both the Doctrinal and Practical parts of the ensuing Subject are hereby pointed out to us.

First, Of the Omniscience of God; that "he knoweth all things." And here;

In this Proposition lies the main Question between us & the Atheists. For, that Something must be Self-Existent; and that That which is Self-Existent, must necessarily be Eternal and Infinite and the Original Cause of all things; will not bear much Dispute. But all Atheists, whether they hold the World to be of itself Eternal both as to the Matter and Form, or whether they hold the Matter only to be Necessary and the Form Contingent, or whatever Hypothesis they frame; have always asserted & must maintain, either directly or indirectly, that the Self-Existent Being is not an INTELLIGENT Being, but either pure unactive MATTER, or, (which in other Words is the same thing,) a mere NECESSARY AGENT. For a mere Necessary Agent must of Necessity either be plainly and directly in the grossest Sense UNINTELLIGENT, which was the antient Atheists' Notion of the Self-Existent Being: Or else its Intelligence, according to the Assertion of the Moderns, must be wholly separate from any Power of Will and Choice; which, in Respect of any Excellency & Perfection, or indeed to any common Sense, is the very same thing as no Intelligence at all.

That the Self-Existent Being is not such a Blind and Unintelligent Necessary, but in the most proper Sense an Understanding & really Active Being; does not indeed so obviously and directly appear to

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us by Considerations *a priori*, because, (thro the Imperfection of our Faculties,) we know not wherein Intelligence consists, nor can see the Immediate & Necessary Connection of it with Self-Existence, as we can that of Eternity, Infinity, Unity, &c. (A) But *a posteriori*, almost every thing in the World, demonstrates to us this great Truth, and affords undeniable Arguments, to prove that the World, and all things in it are the Effects of an Intelligent and Knowing Cause. As,

First. Since in general there are manifestly in Things, various Kinds of Powers, and very different Excellencies & Degrees of Perfection; It must needs be, that in the Order of Causes and their Effects, the Cause must always be more Excellent than the Effect: And consequently the Self-Existent Being, (whatever that be supposed to be,) must of Necessity, (being the Original of all Things,) contain in itself the Sum and highest Degree of all the Perfections of all things, Not because That which is Self-Existent, must ~~therefore~~ have all possible Perfections: (For This, tho most certainly true in itself, yet cannot be so easily demonstrated *a priori*.) But because it is impossible that any Effect should have any Perfection, which was not in the Cause. For, if it had, then That Perfection would be caused by nothing; which is a plain Contradiction. Now, an Unintelligent Being, it is evident, cannot be endued with all the Perfections of all things in the World; because Intelligence is one of those Perfections. All things therefore cannot arise from an Unintelligent Original: And consequently the Self-Existent Being, must of Necessity be Intelligent,

What further proves this, is, the Absurdities and Inconveniencies of the Contrary,

If we deny Knowledge to God, - &c. - (under)

(A) The Divine Perfections are not to be proved by Way of Demonstration, (because there is no Cause of them,) but by Way of Conviction, from *similar Properties* in the World, and by showing the *Absurdities* and *Inconveniencies* of the Contrary.

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that Knowledge belongs to God. As,

I. It is a Perfection, and therefore belongs to God.

In Order to prove plainly and intelligibly, that God is a Being which must of Necessity be endued with perfect Knowledge, it is to be observed, that Knowledge is a Perfection, without which the foregoing Attributes are no Perfections at all; & without which those which follow can have no Foundation.

Natural Reason tells us, (though the Scripture had not said it,) that Knowledge excels Ignorance as much as Light doth Darkness: Now, whatever is perfect and excellent, is to be attributed to the Divine Nature; for, this is the first Notion we have of God, "that he a Being every way perfect."

Secondly, The Denial of this Perfection to God argues many other Imperfections in him; & therefore, Knowledge must belong to God. (A)

Nothing

(A) As we have full convincing Proof of the Existence of One Supreme Being, absolutely perfect, the Maker and Governor of the World; so, by the same clear Evidence we know, that Intelligence is a primary and essential Attribute of his Nature. And,

As this is what all his Works, (the inanimate, the sensitive and the rational parts of the Creation,) teach us, and join in proclaiming the Knowledge and Understanding of their Maker; so, without acknowledging it, we can have no right Conceptions at all of him.

Nothing would more eclipse the Divine Nature than, (if it were possible,) to take-away this Perfection from it.

This would bring an universal Obscurity upon God's other Perfections; this would be to put-out the Light of Heaven, and to "turn the Brightness of the Morning, into the Shadow of Death."

If we remove this perfection from God, we deny his Wisdom.

He that doth not know the Nature and Qualities of things, cannot know how to apply Means to Ends, to fit or suit one thing to another.

Hereby, (i.e) by denying the Knowledge of God, we weaken his Power; for, how weak and ineffectual would it be without Knowledge! what irregular things would it produce? what untoward Combination of Effects would there be, if infinite Power were to act without Knowledge and Understanding? Consequently therefore,

By denying this, we deny his Providence; for, without Knowledge there can be no Counsel nor Forecast of Events, no Provision for the future, nor orderly present Government of the World. But,

This is not all; for without Knowledge there can be no such thing as Goodness; for, he is not good, that doth good out of Ignorance, or from a blind Necessity. Indeed,

There could be no Veracity, nor Justice, nor Mercy in God without this; for, all these do naturally suppose Knowledge in the Most High.

He that speaks Truth must know it: He that is just must understand "Right from Wrong." He that shows Mercy must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved. And,

Not to labour in a thing so plain and easy, Take away the Knowledge of God, and we thereby render him incapable of any Honour from his Creatures. For,

If He know not what Honour we do him, "it is but lost Labour that we give him any." (A)

But further, and that God must be a Being endued with perfect Knowledge, appears from his having communicated to other Beings various Degrees

(A) The Idea of a Being without Knowledge, even supposed eternal, immense and all-powerful, (as that signifies not a voluntary Activity, but a necessary Cause,) is really nothing at all to the Purposes of Religion; being, indeed, of no Importance to us, causing neither Admiration, Honour, nor Esteem.

The Worship of an ignorant Deity is the Reproach of human Nature: For, as no tolerable Apology can be made for the Heathens, who served Idols that "had Eyes & saw not, and Ears but heard not;" so none can be made for us, if we pay our religious Homage to a Being supposed void of Understanding. Whatever other Perfections we ascribe to him, they are yet really no Perfections at all in the deliberate Esteem of the human Mind, separate of themselves & without this.

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Whatever Perfection is in any Effect, must of Necessity have been, & is, much more in the Cause that produced it; seeing nothing can give to another that which in itself it hath not. Wherefore,

Since in created Beings there are many Degrees of Knowledge to be found, it follows necessarily, that the Perfection of Knowledge must be in Him that created them, because he is the Fountain, & they only dependent, as deriving it from him.

"He that planted the Ear shall he not hear? He that formed the Eye shall he not see? He that teacheth man Knowledge shall he not know?" (A)

In the Case of Imperfections, indeed, the Argument lies otherwise; these may be in the Effect, though they were not in the Cause; & the Reason is evident,

Because, though nothing can give what in itself it hath not, yet any Cause may forbear to give all that it has.

Though nothing can communicate more than it hath itself, yet it may communicate as much less as it pleases.

Finiteness, therefore, and all the Consequences of being finite, may be in the Creature, though they were not in the Creator. But,

Whatever is a real positive Perfection, (as Knowledge

Serm. XXIV.

ledge

(A) Since in Men, in particular, there is undeniably that Power which we call Thought, Intelligence, Consciousness, Perception or Knowledge; there must of Necessity either have been from Eternity without any Original Cause at all, an infinite Succession of Men, no One of which having a necessary, but every One a dependent and communicated Being; Or else, these Beings, endued with Perception and Consciousness, must at some Time or other have arisen purely out of that which had no such Quality as Sense, Perception or Consciousness; Or else, they must have been produced by some Intelligent Superiour Being. — There never was, nor can be any Atheist whatsoever, that contends but that One of these Three Suppositions must be the Truth. If therefore the Two former can be proved to be false and impossible, the Last must be owned to be demonstrably true. — Now, that the First is impossible, is evident from the Proposition already given, That if ever there had been Nothing, there never could have been Any Thing, since Nothing could make itself. And, that the Second is likewise impossible, may be thus demonstrated. If Perception or Intelligence, be a distinct Quality or Perfection, and not a mere Effect or Composition of Unintelligent Figure or Motion; then Beings endued with Perception or Consciousness, can never have arisen purely out of that which had no such Quality, because nothing can give to another any Perfection, which it hath not either in itself, or at least in a higher Degree. It remains, therefore, that all things were produced by an Intelligent Superiour Being. But,

Supposing it was possible that the Form of the World, and all the visible things contained in it, with the Order, Beauty, and exquisite Fitness of their Parts; and further, that even Intelligence itself, with Consciousness and Thought, in all the Beings we know, could possibly be the Result or Effect of mere Unintelligent Matter, Figure & Motion; which is the most unreasonable and impossible Supposition in the World; Yet even still there would remain an undeniable Demonstration, that the Self-Existent Being, [whatever it be supposed to be,] must be Intelligent. For even these Principles themselves, [Unintelligent Figure and Motion,] could never have possibly existed, without derived from before them an Intelligent Cause. We instance in Motion. For it is evident there is Now such a Thing as Motion in the World,

There could be no Veracity, nor Justice, nor Mercy in God without this; for, all these do naturally suppose Knowledge in the Most High.

He that speaks Truth must know it; he that is just must understand "Right from Wrong." He that shows Mercy must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved. And,

Not to labour in a thing so plain and easy, Take away the Knowledge of God, and we thereby render him incapable of any Honour from his Creatures. For,

If He know not what Honour we do him, "it is but lost Labour that we give him any." (A)

But further, and that God must be a Being endowed with perfect Knowledge, appears from his having communicated to other Beings various Degrees

(A) The Idea of a Being without Knowledge, even supposed eternal, immense and all-powerful, (as that signifies not a voluntary Activity, but a necessary Cause,) is really nothing at all to the Purposes of Religion; being, indeed, of no Importance to us, causing neither Admiration, Honour, nor Esteem.

The Worship of an ignorant Deity is the Reproach of human Nature: For, as no tolerable Apology can be made for the Heathens, who served Idols that "had Eyes & saw not, and Ears but heard not;" So none can be made for us, if we pay our religious Homage to a Being supposed void of Understanding. Whatever other Perfections we ascribe to him, they are yet really no Perfections at all in the deliberate Esteem of the human Mind, separate of themselves & without this.

pieces of that Perfection. For,
Whatever Perfection is in any Effect must of
 which either began at some Time or other, or was Eternal. If it be-
 gan at any Time, then the Question is granted, that the First Cause is
 an intelligent Being. For mere Unintelligent Matter, and that at
 Rest, it is manifest could never of itself begin to move. — On the
 Contrary, If Motion was Eternal, it was either eternally caused by
 some Eternal Intelligent Being, or it must of itself be necessary and
 Self-Existent; or else, without any Necessity in its own Nature, and
 without any External Necessary Cause, it must have existed from
 Eternity by an Endless Successive Communication.

If Motion was eternally Caused by some Eternal Intelligent Being,
 this is granting the question, as to the present Dispute. — If it was of
 itself Necessary and Self-existent; then it follows, that it must be a
 Contradiction in Terms, to suppose any Matter to be at Rest: And
 yet at the same Time, because the Determination of this Self-existent
 Motion must be *every Way* at once, the Effect of it could be nothing
 else but a perpetual Rest. Besides, [as there is no End of Absurdities
 when once they begin,] it must imply a Contradiction, to suppose that
 there might *possibly* have been originally *more or less* Motion in the U-
 niverse than there *actually* was: For which there was no Necessity at all.

But, if it be said, lastly, that Motion, without any Necessity in its
 own Nature, and without any External Necessary Cause, has existed
 from Eternity, merely by an Endless Successive Communication, it is
 a plain Contradiction; For what could never in Time be of Self-Move-
 ment, could much less be so from all Eternity.

It remains therefore, that Motion must of Necessity be Originally
 Caused by something that is Intelligent; or else there never could have
 been any such Thing as Motion in the World. And consequently,
 the Self-existent Being, the Original Cause of all Things; [what-
 ever is supposed to be,] must of Necessity be an Intelligent Being.

THESE ARGUMENTS PROVE THAT THERE IS A FIRST CAUSE OF ALL THINGS, AND THAT THIS FIRST CAUSE IS AN INTELLIGENT BEING. THE FIRST CAUSE MUST BE NECESSARILY SELF-EXISTENT, AND NOT DEPENDENT ON ANY OTHER CAUSE. IT MUST ALSO BE ETERNAL, AND NOT HAVING A BEGINNING. THESE ARGUMENTS ARE OF THE MOST STRONG AND CLEAR NATURE, AND LEAD TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS A GOD, WHO IS THE FIRST CAUSE OF ALL THINGS.

ledge is,) must have been first and perfect in the original Cause, or else it could never have been transmitted to any thing that was produced.

Our very Understandings, therefore, by which we know God, or any thing else, are undeniable Arguments, that Knowledge and Understanding are in God.

If He "give Wisdom to the wise, and Knowledge to them that know Understanding;" if He communicates these Perfections to the Creature, He himself, as Creator, must be much more possessed of it.

The Scripture, indeed, useth this Argument; but it is mentioned as that which natural Reason suggesteth even to the most ignorant and unlearned; as, "Understand ye brutish among the People, and ye Fools, when will ye be wise? He that made the Ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the Eye, shall he not see?" But further,

That the Self-Existent and Original Cause of all things, is an Intelligent and Wise Being, appears immediately from the excellent Variety, Order, Beauty & wonderful Contrivance, & Finess of all things in the World, to their proper and respective Ends.

This Argument has been so learnedly and fitly handled both by Antient and Modern Writers; that it is but just mentioned, without enlarging upon it,

only.

(A) If Galen so many Ages since, could find in the Construction & Constitution of the Parts of a Human Body, such undeniable Marks of Contrivance and Design, as forced him *Thou* to acknowledge & admire the Wisdom of its Author; What would he have said, if he had known the *late Discoveries* in Anatomy and Physick, the Circulation of the Blood, and the exact Structure of the Heart and Brain, the Use of numberless Glands and Valves for the Secretion and Motion of the Juices in the Body; besides several Veins and other Vessels & Receptacles not at all known, or so much so imagined to have any Existence, in *His Days*; but which *Now* are discovered to serve the wisest and most exquisite Ends imaginable?

If the Arguments against the Belief of the Being of an All-Wise Creator and Governor of the World, which *Epicurus* and his Followers drew from the Faults which they imagined they could find in the Frame and Constitution of the Earth, were so poor and Inconsiderable, that, even in the Infancy of Natural Philosophy, the Greatness of Men contemned and despised them as of no Force; How would they have been ashamed, if they had lived in these Days, when those very things, which they thought to be Faults in the Constitution of Nature, are discovered to be very useful, and of exceeding Benefit to the Preservation and Well-Being of the Whole? And to mention no more: If *Tully*, from the partial and very imperfect Knowledge in Astronomy, which *His Times* afforded, could be so confident of the Heavenly Bodies being Disposed and Moved by a Wise and Understanding Mind, as to declare, that, in his Opinion, whoever affirmed the contrary, was himself (*) void

(*) *Caesarem ergo admirabilem Ordinem, incredibilemque Constantiam, ex qua Conservatio & Salus omnium mundi oritur, qui vincere Mente patet, Is igit Mente expertus habendus est.* de Nat. Deor. lib. 2.

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World itself, according to their System, was greater than *Aristarchus* Spheres? The exquisite Regularity of all the Planets and their Motions.

able from his Being, & must therefore, with him, be infinite. And, Wherever his infinite Knowledge is, it is plain it must necessarily have a thorough Prospect of the inmost Nature & Essence of every thing; so that nothing can be concealed from his Inspection.

Thus far natural Reason convinces us of this Perfection of God. But,

Secondly. Holy Writ and divine Revelation do abundantly confirm it,

I shall not here enumerate all those Testimonies of Scripture which might be gathered-together on this Argument. I shall only instance in two or three, and they the most remarkable. As,

"He that is perfect in Knowledge is with thee;" saith Job. Again,

"Dost thou know the wonderful Works of him that is perfect in Knowledge?" And in the Text,

"God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things." For, "in him are hid all the Treasures both of Wisdom and Knowledge." "The Lord is a God of Knowledge; & by him Actions are weighed." But,

II. Of the Nature, and Extent of it.

The Knowledge of God is perfect, is incapable

Serm. XXIV.

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If He "give Wisdom to the wise, and Knowledge to them that know Understanding;" if He communicates these Perfections to the Creature, only observing this One Thing, [viz] That the Older the World grows, & the deeper Men inquire into Things, and the more Accurate Observations they make, and the more and greater Discoveries they find-out; the stronger this Argument continually grows: which is a certain Evidence of its being founded in Truth. (A) Therefore further,

Another Argument, - &c. - (under)

Another Argument whereby to evince the Certainty of the Proposition before us, (and which, indeed, needs not much Enlargement,) is from the Imensity, or Omnipresence of God. For,

From thence it follows, that his Knowledge must be infinite and perfect. For,

Wherever He Himself is, there is, and must of necessity be, his Knowledge also, which is inseparable

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ons, without any Deviation or Confusion whatever? The inexpressible Nicety of the Adjustment of the Primary Velocity and Original Direction of the *Annual* Motion of the Planets, with their Distance from the Central Body, and their Force of Gravitation towards it? - The wonderful Proportion of the *Diurnal* Motion of the Earth and other Planets about their own Centers, for the Distinction of Light & Darkness; without that disproportionate Whirling of the whole Heavens, which the Antient Astronomers were forced to suppose? The exact Accommodating of the *Densities* of the Planets, to their Distances from the Sun, and consequently to the Proportion of Heat which each of them is to bear respectively; so that neither those which are nearest to the Sun, are destroyed by the Heat; nor those which are farthest off, by the Cold; but each One enjoys a Temperature suited to its proper Uses? The Admirable Order, Number and Usefulness, of the several *Moons*, (as we may properly call them,) never thought-of by Antiquity, but now, by the Help of Telescopes, clearly and distinctly seen to move about their respective Planets; & whose Motions are so exactly known, that their very Eclipses are as certainly calculated & foretold, as those of our Moon? The wonderful Motions of the *Comets*, which are Now known to be as exact, regular, and periodical, as the Motions of Other Planets? And Lastly, The Preservation of the several Systems, and of the several Planets & Comets in the same System, from falling upon each other; which, in the infinite past Time, (had there been no Intelligent, Wise Governor of the Whole,) could not but have really have been the Effect from the smallest possible Resistance by the finest *Aether*, or even by the Rays of Light themselves, to the Motions (supposing it possible there ever could have been any Motions) of Those Bodies? What, (it is here asked,) would Tully, that great Master of Reason, - &c. - [under]

arguments drawn from This Topick: must now, upon the additional Strength of these later Observations, (which are every one an unanswerable Proof of the incomprehensible Wisdom of the Creator,) be utterly ashamed to show its Head. But, "There are greater Things than these, and we have seen but a few of his Works."

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Serm. XXIV.

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of Increase or Diminution, and free from all the Defects observable in human Understandings: "God knoweth all things, even the hidden things of Darkness" and Dishonesty. Not only all our Actions, but the Motives also upon which we act, and the Ends we propose to ourselves in acting, with the Dispositions of our Minds, our secret Thoughts, and hidden things. By this Perfection of his, it is, that God is enabled to dispense Rewards and Punishments in exact Proportion to the Behaviour of all his Creatures. (A) That

(A) Since the Testimony of Conscience is the Measure of our Expectations from God, this necessarily supposes a Persuasion that "he is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all things."

The Argument will be greatly strengthened by the Consideration of God's *Moral* Perfections, his Rectitude, Goodness & Justice, which cannot be fully exercised towards rational Beings, without an infallible and complete Knowledge of their Works. Accordingly,

It has been the common Belief of all Men, (who have had any just Sentiments concerning the Deity,) that he is perfectly acquainted with the Conduct of all moral Agents, and will, some Time or other, render them Recompences according to their Works. And,

If the Foundation upon which we believe this particular Branch of the divine Omniscience, be just, [viz] that, from the Evidences of our moral Constitution and God's Government over us, as rational Creatures, we are accountable to God, as to our Judge, for all our Actions, the Consequence must be allowed, that his Knowledge of our Hearts, and of all that enters into the Morality of our Works, is very perfect. For,

The Character of a Moral-Governor requires, not only that the Condition of Men should be determined according to the moral Quality

That God takes notice of all our Actions is frequently mentioned in Scripture: "The Eyes of the Lord are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good;" "The Ways of Man are all of them before the Eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all their Goings:" Indeed, He

lity of their Tempers and Actions in general, "that it should be well with the Righteous, and ill with the Wicked;" but also that the Sentences passed upon them should bear a Proportion to the Measure of their Goodness or Sinfulness in a State of Trial, which shows how exact the Knowledge of their Judge must be! For,

Altho' all Men come under the Denomination of good and bad, yet both these admit of a great Variety: for, as Good-Men are not all alike good; nor Vicious-Men all alike vicious: so neither will their Enjoyments and Sufferings by the Judgement of God be equal. "They who have sown bountifully, will reap bountifully; and they who have sown sparingly, will reap sparingly:" (i.e.) Men will enjoy Felicity in exact Proportion to the Degree of their virtuous Affections and virtuous Labour. On the other hand,

Some "evil Servants will be beaten with few, & some with many Stripes," (i.e.) their Punishment will be inflicted in Proportion to the Obligations they have violated, which depend on their various Circumstances, Capacities and Opportunities of doing good. Now,

To adjust all this exactly, and appoint to every Man such a Degree of Happiness or Misery as is strictly proportionable to the Measure of Good or Evil in his Dispositions and his Works, which a perfect Moral-Government requires,

To do this, None but an infinite Understanding is sufficient: inasmuch as it requires a full, clear and certain Knowledge of the Hearts of Men, of the Affections which are prevalent in them, of their Motives of Action, and of all the Circumstances which concur to the Perfection of their good Works, or which either aggravate or extenuate

He takes notice of those Actions which are most secret and hidden; "our Father seeth in secret." The Scripture is full of Expressions to this purpose. "Thou hast set our Iniquities before thee, and our secret Sins in the Light of thy Countenance:" Those Sins which we commit in the Dark, are in the Light of the Divine Knowledge. But,

Secondly, God knoweth the Hearts & Thoughts of men. "I the Lord search the Heart, and try the Reins;" (i.e) he hath a perfect Knowledge of the secret Motions and Inclinations of our hearts, for "he knoweth our Thoughts afar off:" "Hell and Destruction are before him; how much more the Hearts of the Children of Men?"

Whatever

are their evil ones.

This Extent of the Divine Knowledge must appear really wonderful to us. For, we find ourselves secure within the Inclosure of our own Breasts, from the Inspection of every human Eye; and we are sensible that none of us can discern the Thoughts and Designs of other men, farther than they discover themselves by outward Signs.

But, how shall we form an Idea of an Understanding which reaches to the most hidden Recesses of our Minds, and infallibly discerns the secret Thoughts and Intents of our Hearts? Yet, this evidently appears to be the Prerogative of the Supreme Being, who without it could not be the proper Judge of Moral Actions, as we are convinced he is. But the Consideration of his Omnipresence naturally leads us to acknowledge it, who, from the Fulness of his active Intelligence, must discern every thing.

Whatever Pretences Men may make, God sees through them, and discovers the very Intentions of their Hearts; for, "God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all things."

This is the peculiar Prerogative of God; this is one of his chief Titles, that "he is a Searcher of our Hearts," & "a Discerner of all our Thoughts."

"It is Thou, even Thou only, who knowest the Hearts of all the Children of Men." — Since God has made the Heart the Seat of all Morality, it is absolutely necessary He should have a perfect Knowledge of all that passes there, in order to be a competent Judge, and to give a final Sentence and Re-tribution of Happiness or Misery. But,

Thirdly, The Omniscience of God takes under it's Comprehension "Things to come." Known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning of the World, from everlasting.

Every free Agent is conscious of his own Intentions, which, if there be not a Defect of Power, may infallibly ascertain the Event; But "the everlasting God fainteth not, nor is weary;" He is able to accomplish his Designs at the remotest Distance of Time, as when they were first formed; and therefore, "known to the Lord are all his Works from the Beginning to the End."

As to the Effects of Necessary Causes, we can easily conceive that he fore-sees them; for they are; (properly speaking,) his own Works.

As he is the first Mover in the material World, (who by his Wisdom originally disposed it's various parts, and by his active Power gave them all their Force,) he therefore knows all the Revolutions which can ever happen in it, and all the Productions which can arise from it; for, he is really the Cause of them, and they are to be attributed to his Operation. But,

That the free moral Actions of intelligent Beings, of which themselves are the sole complete Causes, depending wholly on the Determination of their Wills, and intirely imputed to them as their own; that these should be fore-seen by any Understanding, must appear to us very wonderful, because it is so far above the Reach of human Knowledge, and because there appears in it to us, no particular Ground of Certainty, or Manner of attaining it, consistent with the Freedom of the Agents, whose future Actions are supposed to be known. But yet,

That it really is so, (i.e) that God not only knows the present Thoughts and Intents of our Hearts; but also what we shall do, in all Circumstances whereinsoever we shall be, has been believed by

by the Generality of Mankind, who have thought seriously on this Subject, to be included in the divine Omniscience.

This may be plainly manifested by a Variety of Arguments from Scripture, of Prophecies fulfilled of future Events, which depended on the Choice of Free-Agents; which were not only believed by the weak and superstitious Vulgar, but by Men of the best Understanding, upon clear historical Evidence, such as the famous Prediction of Isaiah concerning the great Revolution in the Eastern Monarchy, which was translated from Babylon, to Persia; and particularly concerning Cyrus, whom the Prophet expressly names long before he was born, describing his memorable Acts, and the Favour granted by him, to the Jews; but by none more, than by the Life and Death of the Messias, (our Saviour,) which was a continued Completion of Circumstances foretold: "who, being delivered by the determinate Counsel and Fore-Knowledge of God, was by wicked Hands crucified and slain." Now, as the Divine Prescience hath extended to these Cases, (wherein Men have acted their Parts as freely as in any other,) no Reason can be assigned why the same Prescience may not be supposed equally to extend to all parallel Cases, (i.e.) to all the voluntary Actions of Men, and to all the Events which

are accomplished by them. But,

Not to insist at present on Arguments taken from Revelation, however convincing they may appear to be; it seems, that if we only acknowledge the Universal Dominion of the supreme Being over the World, and his moral Government over his rational Creatures, the freest Actions of Men and all other moral Agents, are foreseen by him; otherwise there must be an Uncertainty in the Measures of his Administration.

As the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments is a very eminent Part of his Government, in which the Honour of his Majesty, and his moral Perfections, are nearly concerned, and which is attended with the most remarkable Changes in the State of the World, it must be unknown to himself, in particular, with all the Consequences of it, if the Behaviour of rational Creatures, (to which it bears an exact Proportion,) is unforeknown. But,

This is a Supposition, which we can scarcely think consistent with the Glory of his absolute Supremacy, the Perfection of his Wisdom, and the Immutability of his Counsels. For,

Thus saith the Almighty, "I am God, and there is none like unto me; declaring the End from the Beginning, and from ancient Times, the things that

that are not yet done : saying, my Counsel shall stand, and I will do all my Pleasure."

(Future things, then, are known to God; this is his peculiar Prerogative. But,

The great Difficulty is concerning the Consistency of this infallible Divine Prescience with the Liberty of human Actions.

That all future Events are known to God, is a Doctrine of revealed Religion ; it appears from the many Prophecies in Scripture, concerning the good and evil Actions of Men.

That we are free Beings is evident both from Reason and Revelation . We cannot, indeed , give proof of this Freedom by our Actions ; because we cannot do a thing, and not do it, at the same time . But, we have an inward Sense, strong and clear Assurance of an inherent natural Power to refrain from it, or do the contrary. (A) And, we perceive that

(A) The Notion of *Free-Will*, (so far as is necessary to all rational Agents , to make their Actions morally good or bad ,) is a Principle that seems to rise out of the Light of Nature , That no Man is accountable , rewardable , or punishable , but for that in which he acts freely, without Force or Compulsion.

Some imagine , that Liberty must suppose a Freedom to do or not to do , and to act contrarywise at Pleasure.

To Others it seems not necessary that such Liberty should be carried to denominate Actions morally good or bad . — God cer-

that we are at Liberty either to act wisely or wickedly, so we judge like free Beings of our past Actions & acquit or condemn ourselves accordingly. (A)

This natural and irresistible Inclination to blame or

certainly acts in the perfectest Liberty, yet He cannot sin. — Christ had the most exalted Liberty in his human Nature, of which a Creature was capable, & his Merit was the highest; yet he could not sin. — Angels and glorified Saints, tho' no more capable of Rewards, are perfect Moral-Agents, & yet they cannot sin: And the Devils, with the Condemned, tho' not capable of further Punishment; yet, are still Moral-Agents, and cannot but sin.

This Indifferency, therefore, "TO DO, or NOT TO DO," cannot be the true Notion of Liberty. — A truer One, therefore, seems to be This, (viz) That a Rational Nature is not determined as mere Matter, by the Impulse and Motion of Others upon it; but is capable of Thought; and, upon considering the Objects set before it, makes Reflection, and so chuses. (see the latter part of Note, (A) Vol. 1. page 275.)

Liberty, therefore, seems to consist in this inward Capacity of thinking, and of acting and chusing upon Thought. And, the clearer the Thought is, and the more constantly that Choice is determined by it, the more does a Man rise-up to the highest Acts, and sublimest Exercises of Liberty.

(A) We are conscious to ourselves of all the Liberty in Action, which we can think essentially requisite to the Purposes of Morality. We know that we are under no Constraint in doing Good or Evil, but that our Choice or Refusal of the One or the Other, proceeds from our own Affections and the inward Determination of our own Minds.

In every Sin that we commit, we plainly perceive that we do it with so much Freedom, that we might not have done it. This is the Foundation of the inward Self-Condemnations, or Self-Approbations which we feel.

or approve ourselves, would be very improper, if we were over-ruled in all things by a fatal Necessity. Upon the whole,

It is certain that God fore-sees the future Actions of Men, and it is equally certain that Men are Free-Beings.

The Difficulty of reconciling these things should, therefore, be ascribed to the Imperfection of our limited Understandings, & to the incomprehensible Nature of God.

We cannot, indeed, conceive how God can fore-see things which depend upon our own Choice, and which we may either do, or not do. But,

One Thing we easily conceive, & certainly know, (viz) that finite Capacities cannot comprehend the Extent, & several Ways of infinite Wisdom.

The Free-Agency of Man, and the Fore-Knowledge of God, (however difficult for us to reconcile) have both of them been believed from the remotest Antiquity; and that, not from any Reasonings upon the divine Perfections, but from ancient Traditions, and from divine Revelations and Predictions.

In a Word; The Scriptures every where treat us as free Beings, & agree with our Reason in assuring us, that we are accountable to God for all our Actions; and yet, in the strongest Terms, and by

many repeated & infallible Proofs, assure us of the Prescience of the Almighty. And indeed,

It seems not at all impossible that God should know "what is to come." On the contrary, it is highly reasonable to think that he doth, and must know things future.

Whatever happens in the World, which does not come immediately from him, must be either the Effect of mechanical Causes, or of the Motions of living Beings and Free-Agents. Now,

As to the former, it cannot be impossible for him, upon whom the Being and Nature of every thing depends, and who, therefore, must intimately know all their Powers, and what Effects they will have, It is impossible but that he should know them. (A)

Even

(A) The Argument taken from God's being the intelligent Cause and supreme Ruler of all things, to prove that he knows the whole Extent of actual Existence, and whatever is done within it's Compass, in which all the Operations of Rational Beings are included; This Argument proves as strongly for the same Extent of absolute eternal Prescience. For,

If the whole Frame of Nature now actually in being, and the entire Scheme of Providence, which is now carrying-on, comprehending all it's Series of Events; if these be the Works of Design, they must be known before they began to be. And, It is absurd to think that Powers wholly derived from, and absolutely depending on a wise Author, for Ends which He intended, should not be fore-seen by him, with all their Exercises, and all their possible Productions.

Even we ourselves, if we are satisfied of the Goodness of the Materials of which any thing is made, & understand the Source & Determination of those Powers by which it is moved, can tell what it will do, and what will be the Effect of it. And, as to those things which depend upon the voluntary motions of Free-Agents, it is well known that their Freedom, with respect to these, can only consist in a Liberty either to act as their own Reason & Judgment shall determine them, or to neglect their rational Faculties. Now, he who knows what is in Men's Power, & what not, -- knows the Make of their Bodies, & all the Mechanism and Propensions of them, knows the Nature and Extent of their Understandings, and what will determine them to this way or that, -- knows all the Process of natural or second Causes, and consequently how these will work upon them: He who knows all this, may know what Men will do, if he can but know this one thing more, (viz) whether they will use their rational Faculties aright, or not. And,

Since even we ourselves, (mean and defective as we are,) can, in some Measure, conceive how so much as this may be done, and seem to want but one Step to finish the Account: can we, with any show of Reason, deny to a perfect Being

Scrin. XXIV. this

this one Article more, or think that he cannot do that too; especially if we call to mind that this very Power of using our own Faculties is held of him?

Let us but observe what a Sagacity there is in some Men, not only in physical Causes and Effects, but also of the future Actings of Mankind: And,

How very easy it is many Times, (if the Persons concerned, their Characters and Circumstances given,) to see what they will do; as also to fore-tell many general Events, tho the intermediate Transactions upon which they depend, are not known.

Let us consider also, how much more remarkable this Penetration is in some Men than in others. And also further,

That if there be any Minds more perfect than the Human, (and who can be so conceited of himself, as to question this?) they must have it in a still more eminent Degree, proportionable to the Excellency of their Natures. And,

— Lastly, if we allow, (as certainly we must,) this Power of discerning to be in God, proportionable to his Nature, as in lower Beings it is proportionable to theirs; then it becomes infinite; and consequently the future Actions of free Agents are at once all unlocked, and lie exposed to his View;
for

for that Knowledge is not infinite, which is limited to things past or present, or which come to pass necessarily.

What has been said is only a feeble Attempt to show how far even We ourselves can go toward a Conception of the Manner in which future things may be known. But,

As we have no adequate Idea of an infinite and perfect Being, his Powers, (and among them, his Power of Knowing,) must infinitely surpass all our Understanding.

We can never, then, conclude that it is impossible for an infinitely perfect Being to know what a free Agent will choose to do, till we can comprehend all the Powers of such a Being, (i.e.) till we ourselves are infinite and perfect.

"To attempt to comprehend the Manner of God's knowing, is the same as to endeavour to become what he is." "Perfect even as God, which in Heaven is perfect; sitting ourselves in the Seat of God, judging of his Nature, even as though we ourselves were Gods." (A) But further, This

(A) As to the Manner of God's fore-knowing certainly future Events, (i.e.) which have no necessary Cause, nor are to be accomplished by his own Power, and the Determination of his Will, but produced by other Free-Agents; this seems to be incomprehensible by
Serm. XXIV. the

This Knowledge is not only possible, but is what hath been already proved concerning the Deity; and is what his Perfections do necessarily infer, "that nothing can be hid from him," For,

If Ignorance be an Imperfection, the Ignorance of future Acts and Events must be so; and then, if all Imperfections are to be denied of him, this also must.

There the human Understanding. That any Mind should see with Certainty a distinct Event, which does not necessarily proceed from the Nature of Things, nor is fixed by the Purpose of a voluntary Agent, is wonderful to us, and surpasses our Understanding. For, as our Knowledge of Futurity, can only rest on One or other of these Foundations, we can form no distinct Notion of any Fore-Knowledge without them.

It is, probably, the apprehending the divine Prescience after this Manner, and limiting it to these Grounds, hath occasioned all the Perplexity in the Minds of Men on this Matter, and involved their Speculations in so much Confusion. — Some imagining that contingent Events could not otherwise be so ascertain'd, as to be infallibly known, have supposed peremptory eternal Decrees concerning all of them, even the very freest Actions of Men; and not only so, but a previous Influence on the active Powers of rational Creatures, exciting them to Action. — Whilst Others, judging this to be utterly inconsistent with human Liberty, and, with respect to evil Actions, inconsistent with the Purity and Goodness of the Divine Nature; yet still adhering to the same limited Foundation of Fore-Knowledge, have denied the Doctrine of Prescience altogether, or greatly doubted concerning it.

The best way, therefore, to free ourselves from these Difficulties, is wholly to neglect these Hypotheses, which have thus been invented to account for the Manner of the divine Prescience, acknowledging that it is to us, after all, inexplicable, and yet concluding that this is no sufficient Objection against a Doctrine otherwise well-confirmed.

There is indeed a common Prejudice against the Prescience, (as it is usually called,) of God, which suggests, that if God fore-knows things, he fore-knows them infallibly; and, if so, then they are certain; and, if certain, then they are no longer Matter of Freedom; and thus, (say they,) Prescience and Freedom are inconsistent. But surely, the Nature of a thing is not changed, by being known, or known before-hand. For, if it is truly known, it is then known to be what it really is, & therefore is not altered by this.^(A) The Truth is, God fore-sees, or rather sees the Actions of free Agents, because they will be; not that they will be, because

ven as we find ourselves obliged to in Inquiries concerning the other Perfections of God, which are evidently proved to belong to his Nature, and therefore believed, tho' to us incomprehensible. We acknowledge his Omnipresence, Eternity, Self-Existence, and Omnipotence; yet the Nature of these Attributes, and the Manner of their Being, particularly that of his Power, in creating things out of Nothing; which as much exceeds our Comprehension as his Fore-Knowledge of future Contingencies.

We cannot, indeed, believe Contradictions. To impose them upon us, is to affront the rational Nature.

Quodcumque mihi ostendis sic, Incredulus odi.

— — Whatever contradicts my Sense

I hate to see, and never can believe.

But, it is no Contradiction to believe the Existence and Properties of a Being, whom "we cannot by SEARCHING find out, nor understand to Perfection."

Serm. XXIV.

(A) Suppose a Man, by an internal Principle of Motion, and an absolute Freedom of Will, without any external Cause or Impulse at all, does some particular Action *to Day*; and suppose it was not possible that this Action should have been fore-seen *Yesterday*; was there not nevertheless the same Certainty of Event, as if it had been fore-seen? (i.e.) would it not, notwithstanding the *supposed* Freedom, have been as certain a Truth Yesterday and from Eternity, that this Action was in Event to be performed *to Day*, (the supposed never so impossible

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to have been Fore-known,) as it is now a Certain and infallible Truth that it is performed? — Mere Certainty of Event therefore, does not in any Measure imply Necessity: and consequently Fore-Knowledge, however difficult to be explained as to the Manner of it, yet, (since it is manifest it implies no other Certainty, than what the Thing would equally have without being Fore-known,) is evident that it also implies no Necessity.

cause he fore-sees them. (A) It is the future Choice of the Free-Agent that determines the Prescience of the Almighty.

"As we do not force the things that are past, (saith an ancient Father,) to have been done by our remembering them; so, God doth not force the things that are in future to be done by his fore-knowing them." (B) In a word,

It involves no Contradiction at all in it to assert, that God certainly knows what any Man will choose, and therefore that he should do this, cannot be said to be impossible. (c) Upon the whole,

The

(A) *Non facimus Deus quidd scit, - Scit potius quidd facimus.*

The Certainty of Fore-Knowledge does not cause the Certainty of Things, but is itself founded on the Reality of their Existence. What-ever now Is, 'tis certain that it Is; and it was Yesterday & from Eternity as certainly true, that the Thing *could be* to Day, as it is now certain that it Is. And This Certainty of Fore-Knowledge is equally the same whether it be supposed that the thing could be Fore-known, or not. For whatever at any Time Is, it was certainly true from Eternity, that to the Event, that That Thing *could be*. And the certain Truth of every future Event, would not at all have been the less, tho' they had been no such thing as Fore-Knowledge. Fore-Prescience therefore, has no Influence at all upon any thing, nor contributes in the least towards making it Necessary. We may illustrate this in some Measure by the Comparison of our own Knowledge.

That Judas should betray our Saviour, God fore-knew; but did not fore-appoint it; only he chose, on purpose, into the Number of his Disciples, one such Person, the Wickedness of whose Heart, he saw, would accomplish that Event. Again, That

The Perfections and Prerogatives of the divine Knowledge, then, are certain and infallible, easy, vast and comprehensive.

The Prerogative of the divine Understanding is secure from all Possibility of Error. 'Tis God only that cannot be deceived.

As it is thus certain, so is it also easy and free of Access. We must dig deep for Knowledge, and take a great deal of Pain to know a little. But the Understanding of God being infinite, & nothing is at Distance from it, nothing too vast or great for it's Comprehension; nor is there any thing so little, as thereby to escape his Knowledge & Animadversion. But all things, "great and small, one with another," are equally known unto Him.

He

That Ahab should fall at Ramoth-Gilead, God foresaw and forewarned him of it; yet God's Knowledge did not make it necessary for him to go up and perish there; but the mere Wickedness of his own Will, despising the divine Admonition, as it was the only Cause of the Event, so was it the only Ground of the Fore Knowledge.

Had Ahad been disposed to repent at the Advice of the Prophet, it was in his Power to have prevented his Destruction, and the Fore-Knowledge of God would then have been accordingly, the Fore-Knowledge of a contrary Event.

The same may be understood in general concerning all Exhortations offered to wicked persons, which God before-hand knows, that thro' their own Wickedness, they will not obey.

Serm. XXIV.

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"As we do not force the things that are past;

We know certainly, that some things Are; and when we know that they are, they cannot but Be; yet his evident and Knowledge does not at all affect the Things, to make them more necessary, or more certain. Now, Fore-Knowledge in God, is the very same as Knowledge. All Things are to him as if they were equally present, to all the Purposes of Knowledge and Power. He knows perfectly every thing that is; And he knows whatever shall be, in the same Manner as he knows what is. As therefore Knowledge has no Influence on things that are; so neither has Fore-Knowledge, on things that shall be.

(B) As the Knowledge which God has of our Actions, whether present or future, is what we are not conscious of, nor find any Influence of it upon our self-determining and active Powers; so does it not really change their Nature or Quality, making them more or less free.

Fore-Knowledge has no Influence upon the Nature of things, to make the least Alteration in them. The simple divine Prescience has no kind of Causality in the Production, nor does it at all affect the Nature and Kind of Events which are the Objects of it.

(C) To illustrate the above by Examples.

That Christ should die for the Sins of Men God not only foreknew, but fore-appointed it also, and sent him into the World on purpose to that End.

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Serm. XXIV.

He is said, indeed, in Scripture, "to search the Heart, & try the Reins, & weigh the Spirit." But,

These Expressions do not signify the Painfulness, but the Perfection of his Knowledge, that he knows these things as perfectly as we can do any thing, about which we exercise the greatest Diligence and most minute Exactness.

As the Knowledge of God is thus certain & easy, so is it also universal, and extends to all Objects.

The divine Understanding is vast and comprehensive, & by an imperious View commands every thing "He is greater than our Hearts, & knoweth all things; for his Understanding is infinite."

Upon the Whole, the Knowledge of God extends most universally to every thing, "neither is there any Creature that is not manifest in his Sight: But all things are naked and open unto the Eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

He alone knows Himself (A) dwelling in the Light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see." He

(A) It is certain that the Knowledge of God extends to the whole Compass of Existence. Since all things that have Being are either God himself, or his Works, it is impossible that any thing should be unknown to him. He is the most excellent of all Objects, and the most incomprehensible by us; but yet, a Reflection on what passes in our

He knows every particular Creature. (A) every Action, and all their Thoughts: He knows all things past, and that have ceased to be; - the present; - all things future, and that are yet to come. This his Knowledge

own Minds will lead us to this Conclusion, that his Perfections, which infinitely transcend our Capacity, are in the nearest and most immediate View of his own Understanding: For, all the Conceptions, and all the Actions of intelligent Beings, with the Principles from which they proceed, are accompanied with Consciousness.

Of all the Subjects to which we apply our Thoughts, our own Faculties and the Exercise of them are the most clearly discerned, and the best understood by us. We know every Idea that is presented to our Minds, with every Imagination; every Desire and Volition, with every Enjoyment. "The self-conscious Spirit of a Man knows every thing within him." Accordingly, therefore, we must so judge concerning all intelligent Beings, even to the highest and most comprehensive Understanding.

(A) It is directly and immediately evident, that the whole of created Existence is perfectly known to God, because it is all the Work of his Hands, and up-held by the Word of his Power.

Every voluntary Agent must be supposed to understand his own Productions. As God; therefore, is the voluntary Maker of all things, disposing the whole Frame of Nature as it pleased him, and continually governs it by his own immediate Agency; nothing can be hid from him.

If, in all that Variety of Being, and all the Appearances which are in the Universe, from the greatest to the least, from the utmost Circuit of Heaven to the Center of the Earth, there is nothing which his Hand has not formed, and which his Providence does not direct: Every thing, therefore, must be thoroughly known to him; for, wherever his Power works, there his Understanding discerns.

Serm. XXIV.

Knowledge is clear and distinct, is full and perfect, is immediate & comprehensive; yet withall, is simple & uncompounded, without reasoning or inferring premising or concluding; for, he has ever before him, in one simple View, the whole Field of Truth, and with one single Act of Intuition glances thro' the whole Possibility of Being; and being thus perfect himself, is the Fountain of all Knowledge, both what he possesseth himself, & communicates to others; and there is nothing that can take it from him.

It is not Pretended, by the foregoing Arguments, to have given a full and compleat Idea of the Divine Knowledge, (which it is not to be imagined we can comprehend; for, that were to suppose that Our Understandings are like His, INFINITE,) but only to have laid down such Observations concerning the Nature, the Manner and Extent of it, as may give us a just and magnificent, tho' imperfect Idea of that adorable Perfection, and which tend to produce those pious Dispositions, and that dutiful Respect which it claims from us.

Sermon

OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

SERMON XXV.

On the same Subject.

I. John, iii. 20. "God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things."

The pious Dispositions, & the dutiful Respect which the Knowledge of God claims from us, (the purposed Subject of the present Discourse,) are many and engaging. As,

- First, From the Perfection of God's Knowledge, we infer the Necessity of Veneration.

Every Excellency commands Reverence, and raiseth our Admiration according to the Greatness of it; now, among all these, there is none we value Ourselves, or Others more by, than this of Knowledge. And,

If we reverence a little Knowledge compassed about with Ignorance, how exceedingly should we admire "the Father of Lights, in whom is no Darkness at all!" How should we admire that Knowledge, which hath nothing of Blemish, or Imperfection.

perfection in it, but "reacheth to every thing mightily; and in Wisdom, sweetly ordereth all things!" But,

II. We may hence learn Humility, and that on a two-fold Account, as we have all our Knowledge from him; and as our Knowledge, when compared with the Divine, is very imperfect.

"What have we, that we have not received?" And how few things in Comparison are they, that we are capable of knowing? And of those things we know, how very imperfect is our Knowledge? So that the more we know of God and Ourselves, the more humble we shall, and ought to be.

III. This is matter of Comfort & Encouragement: He knows our Wants and Weaknesses, and will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear, and will supply all our Wants; for, "He knoweth of what we have Need before we ask him."

But further, From God's knowing our secret Thoughts, we infer,

First, That this discovers and confutes the secret Atheism of many.

He that commits the most secret Sin, denies the Omniscience of God. Thus David describes the
Atheism

Atheism of some in his Days : "He hath said, in his Heart, God hath forgotten, he hideth his Face, & will never see it." "The Lord will not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard it."

Such a Procedure as this, is, in Effect, to deny the Existence of the Almighty; for, it is to deny him to be what he really is. A Man may as well say there is no Sun, as deny that it shines and enlightens the World; for by denying his Essence, we endeavour wholly to destroy his Existence.

While wicked Men live in their Sins, they live in the Denial of God's Omniscience; did they really believe that "God sees in Secret," and that the Light of his Eyes pierceth through the most remote Darkness, they surely could not, at the same time, do Deeds of Iniquity.

Let us, therefore, be particularly heedful against all Sin in general, but especially of all Sins of Privacy & Retiredness, (A) of Hypocrisy and Self-Deceit; all which, in a particular Manner, seem to be levelled, (through Infidelity,) against this Attribute of the Deity, the Omniscience of God, and is a "doing-despight to the Spirit of Knowledge."

If we believe that "God is Light," of what Security

(A) *Nil turpe committas, nequē coram aliis, nequē tecum; Maxime omnium verere teipsum. — Honeſta donis Viris, non occulta queruntur.*

Serm- XXV.

Security is Darkness to us? None in the least, for "the Darkness & Light to him are both alike."

In vain, then, doth the Eye of the "Adulterer" wait for the Twi-light, saying, no Man shall see me, and disguiseth his Face." For,

The Light shutteth him not from us, neither doth the Darkness seclude us from him.

Let us live, then, as those who believe this; let us be continually under the Power of this Apprehension, that God takes a particular & exact Notice of all our Actions. The firm Belief of this would have a double Influence upon us; it would encourage us in well-doing, and constantly restrain us from Sin. But further,

God's Knowledge of the Heart teacheth us,

First, The Folly of Hypocrisy. How vain is it to make a Shew of that outwardly, which inwardly & in our Hearts we are not; - to put-on a Mask of Religion, & paint ourselves beautifully without, when "inwardly we are full of Rottenness, and all Uncleaness;" - to "honour God with our Lips, when our Hearts are far from him?" (A)

If

(A) How ridiculous does Hypocrisy appear to a Man who considers that "all things are naked and open unto the Eyes of him with whom we have to do!" That no outward Solemnities, - no Forms of Devotion, or Appearances of Zeal can impose upon his most perfect

If we were to deal with Men, this were not a very wise Way, for there is Danger of Discovery even from them; how much more, then, from "God, who is a Discerner of Hearts?"

The best way, therefore, for a Man to seem to be any thing, is, really to be what he would seem to be. But,

Having to deal with God, who "knows our Thoughts afar off," to whom all our Disguises are apparent, and all our little Arts of Concealment upon, tis Madness to "hide our Iniquity in our Bosom."

With this Argument, our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical Pharisees: "Ye are they that justify yourselves before Men, but God knoweth your Hearts." God sees not as Man sees; He looks not on the outward Appearance, but on the Heart, discerning all it's most secret Imaginations and Contrivances. Again,

If God knows our Hearts, then let us endeavour to approve them before him.

This
 Understanding! That He sees thro' the most subtle Disguises & plausible Pretences which an insincere Heart can put on. And that they are as odious to him as the most open & bare-faced Wickedness!

Serm. XXV.

Part 7

This is a Point of the greatest Importance to us, and therefore should affect our Hearts in the most sensible Manner, because we have to do with God as our Law-Giver and Judge, who is perfectly qualified for this important Part of his Administration, by his exact Knowledge of Men, their Ways and Works, even to the most secret of them.

His Knowledge of other things may excite our Admiration; but this more immediately concerns us, and calls for our Attention, because the greatest Consequences depend upon it: (viz) our Happiness in the Enjoyment of his Favour, if he sees that our "Works are perfect," and that we have "walked before him in Integrity, and with upright Hearts," or lasting miserable Effects of his Disapprobation, if he knows that we have been Workers of Iniquity.

Indeed, There is no Consideration more affecting to serious attentive Minds, or which more directly tends to produce Sincerity in our whole Behaviour, than this of God's knowing our Hearts. There is naturally a Disposition in the Minds of Men to approve themselves to those intelligent Beings who are Witnesses of their Conduct. And!

What greater Witness can there be than that of the Most-High God, who always beholds us, and from whose Notice nothing can escape!

Let us, therefore, charge ourselves with inward
Purity

Purity and Holiness; because of the pure Eyes of him who beholds the most intimate & secret Motions of our Souls: No Consideration being more awful than that of the Omniscience of God, extending to all our Works, and to every Circumstance which may heighten their moral Goodness or Malignity. And yet,

What a strange Freedom do we take within our own Breasts? This is a sufficient Argument of the secret Atheism that lies at the Bottom of our Hearts. He that allows himself in any wicked Thoughts and Imaginations, which, out of Regard to Men, he will not put in Practice, this Man plainly declares that he reverences Men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or despiseth him. Let us therefore "keep our Hearts with Diligence," because they are peculiarly under God's Inspection; and when we are ready to take the Liberty of our Thoughts, because no Eye sees us, then let us, (as the Wise-Man speaks,) ask ourselves, "Doth not He that pondereth the Heart, consider it? and he that keepeth the Soul, doth he not know it?" Therefore,

"Whatever we do in the Service of God, let us do it heartily, as unto the Lord." Indeed,

If we only worshipped God to be seen of Men,
Serm, XXV.

an external Worship would be sufficient; but, Religion is not intended to please Men, but God. He is a Spirit, and sees our Spirit, we must "worship him, therefore, with our Spirit, & in Truth;" "not as pleasing Men, but God, who trieth the Hearts, and Reins, and requireth Truth in the inward Parts."

Let us, therefore, always remember the excellent Instruction of our Saviour, (viz) that if we would hope for Acceptance with God in our Prayers or Alms, it is absolutely necessary for us to avoid Pomp and Ostentation in them. A prevailing Desire of human Applause, or, (as he expresses it,) making it our chief End to be "seen of Men," will undoubtedly destroy the Sincerity of all our religious Works, (so called,) and cut-off our Claims to the divine Approbation. But,

If we perform our Obedience only as to our Heavenly Father, with an affectionate Sense upon our Minds of his all-seeing Eye observing us in Secret, & with an upright Intention to please him, he will accept of our Services, and "will himself reward us openly." But further,

This Consideration of the divine Omniscience should not only engage us to Sincerity in our Worship, but to universal Purity of Heart, & Integrity in our whole Conversation. For, As

As all the Parts of our moral Conduct are equally under the Direction of his Law, which "requires us to do justly, and to love Mercy, as well as to walk humbly with our God," - and "every Work will be brought into Judgment before him, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;" so his Eye is continually upon us in all the Affairs of Life, and in every other Deliberation and Design, as well as in our immediate Addresses to him.

Tho wicked Men may be able to hide their Designs from the View of the World, & thereby escape with Impunity in it; yet, God is Witness to their most secret Devices, even to the Sin which they have only meditated in their Hearts, altho it was never executed; and will render proportionably to them. Again,

This renders all the deep and profound Policies of wicked Men, vain.

"The Lord knows, the Thoughts of Men, that they are but Vanity." He knows them, and can defeat them: "He can bring their Councils to nought, and make their Devices to be of none Effect."

When the Politicians of the World think that they have laid their Designs with all imaginable

Serm. XXV.

Caution

Caution, and that their Councils cannot miscarry, (being out of all Possibility of human Discovery and Prevention;) Yet, notwithstanding, they may be defeated; - though they have resolved, yet it may not stand. "He that sits in Heaven shall laugh them to Scorn, the Lord shall have them in Derision."

As wise as they are, they are yet guilty of this Folly, that they did not take God into the Account; by whom, therefore, they are justly surprized and confounded. Again,

If God only knows the Hearts of Men, then, Who, and "What art Thou, O Man, that judgest another Man's Heart?"

This shows the great Iniquity of those who boldly take upon them to censure the Hearts, the secret Intentions, the inward Principles and Ends from which Men act; and that, when they are neither owned by their Words, nor necessarily follow from their Actions.

Open Crimes, indeed, fall under our Cognizance, and therefore, (when we have Authority to do it,) we may speak; for, whatsoever falls under the Authority of Man to punish, falls under the Judgment of Man to censure. Yet,

When

When we pass from the Evil of the Action, (which is obvious to our View,) to judge of the Heart and Intentions, (which is not subject to our View,) we, in Effect, step into the Throne of God, and affect to be equal to the Most-High. For,

We usurp a judicial Power, pertaining only to the supreme Governor of the World, and pretend to be Searchers of the Hearts, and so to be possessed of that Perfection of the Deity which only renders him sufficient for the Discharge of sovereign Authority. For,

As it is in Respect of his Dominion, that hath the supreme Right to judge, so is it with Respect to his Knowledge of Men's Hearts, that he hath an incommunicable Capacity for it. We may pronounce an Action wicked, if it be contrary to the Rule given; this we may do, provided we be called to it, and are sure it is so. But,

To call any Man an Hypocrite, who makes an outward Profession of Religion, and whose external Conversation is unblamable; This is to judge a man in a Matter of which we can have no Evidence. - This is to ascend into Heaven, and to step into the Throne of God, and to be like the Most-High; for He, even He only, knows the Hearts of the Children of Men.

"Judge nothing, therefore, before the Time, until
Serm. XXV. till

till the Lord come, who will not only bring to Light the hidden things of Darknes; but will even make manifest the Counsels of the Heart, and then shall every Man have Praise of God," - the Praise that is justly due to his Works.

It is, therefore, with great Reason that the Apostles insist so much on this necessary Caution to Christians, that they do not judge one another; which is not only becoming the Deference they owe to the superior Knowledge of their common Master, and their professed Expectation of appearing before his Tribunal; but is the only Foundation upon which Charity and Peace can subsist among them.

This Inference may be further improved by a Consideration of the Effect it has to support us under all unjust and harsh Censure.

We ought not to be immoderately affected with the unjust Censures which others may ignorantly cast on us. It is true,

Every Man is desirous of standing-fair in the Esteem of the World: and good Men value Reputation even with the Weak, as being that by which they are rendered more capable of being useful to them. But still, There is a sufficient Consolation to the sincere against unjust Reproaches, in the Testimony of their own Conscience, and in the im-
partial

partial, unerring Judgment of him who searches the Heart.

If the Praise of wise and virtuous Men be a Support against the undeserved Calumnies of the ignorant and the wicked, how much more may he enjoy an undisturbed Tranquility in his own Breast, who having the Approbation of his own Mind, can securely appeal to an infallible Witness, and leave his Actions to be tried by the righteous Judge of the World: And consequently, to him "it is a very small thing to be judged of Men, or of Man's Judgment, seeing that he that judgeth righteously," (i.e) with righteous Judgment, "is the Lord."

But further, From the Fore-Knowledge of God, (as already explained,) we infer the Necessity of Veneration.

This particular Branch of God's Omniscience, gives us a very high Idea of him, as the only proper Object of Adoration.

How wonderful! How much to be esteemed for it's Perfection, is that Understanding, which not only sees distinctly all the past and present Actions and Thoughts of all intelligent Beings, but those also which are yet future, and discovers, even at the greatest Distance of Duration, all the Productions of free, as well as necessary Causes! What

Serm. XXV.

can

can be hid from him "who understands our Thoughts afar-off?" & from whose Sight no Darkness can cover any thing?

How despicable are the Idols of the Nations, who know not, "nor can declare things to come!"

How infatuated are their Worshipers! How unhappy as well as inexcusable are they, who acknowledge no other God than Chance or Necessity! For, what Satisfaction can any intelligent Being have in a World, supposed to be under no intelligent Direction, but the Course of things are left wholly to blind Fortune, or irresistible Fate, equally unknowing of Futurity? On the contrary,

The sincere Servants of the true and living God have the never-failing Consolation, that however ignorant they are of what is to come, concerning which their Minds are naturally anxious, He, (i.e.) God, sees the End from the Beginning, and no Event can possibly surprize him; for even the freest Purposes of Men, and all other rational Agents, were known in his eternal Counsels; and the Issues of them comprehended in the fore-appointed Scheme of his Administration. But further,

The Doctrine before us is of great Use in the rightly adjusting the much controverted Points of Predestination and Election.

The

The Predestination of good Men to eternal Life is upon God's Fore-Sight of what they will do, is founded upon his Fore-Knowledge of their complying with the Means of Salvation offered. The very Order of the Words do suppose it; "Whom he did Fore-Know them he did predestinate." (A)

Again, From God's Knowledge of future Events, we learn,

First, The Vanity of all those Arts and Methods by which Men pretend to fore-tell.

The Vanity of these Arts has been sufficiently shown by learned Men, from the Weakness & Uncertainty of the Principles they rely upon. (B)

(A) 'Twas this that made God to select Abraham from all the rest of Mankind for the Purpose of preserving his Religion among Men, "for I know him, (saith God,) that he will command his Children, and his House-hold after him; and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

See Fidds' excellent Sermon on this Subject: 313 page, Folio.

No Man has Reason to think himself rejected of God, either from Eternity or Time, that does not find the present Marks of Reprobation in his ill Intentions and Actions.

(B) If any of the Wretches, pretending to Arts of Magick, Witchcraft, Fortune-telling, or such-like wicked Follies, either have, or imagine they have, any Communication with the Devil, serm. XXV. they

I shall only for the present take-notice, that it contradicts this Principle of Religion, that future Events are known only by God. It is the peculiar Attribute of God, and not communicable to any finite Being, to foreknow all things that shall be, before they come to pass; and therefore the Prophet, when he would expose the Vanity of worshipping Idols or false Gods, challenges them to foretel future Events. Yet, ^{proving the Power of (under) Nature to him} arrogates to himself that which is the prerogative of the Deity.

We need not, therefore, marvel that God delights to

they plainly rebel against God, and endeavour at least to confederate with his Enemy. Or, if they only pretend a Communication with him; as indeed is usual, if not always; it is mere Pretence; yet this is a siding with him. And, even when they do not so much as pretend it, and would make us believe that they have such extraordinary Skill and Power, derived from more innocent Sources; tho they profess no Respect to his Person; yet they imitate him in one of his worst Qualities, as "he is the Father of Lies." And, Lies of this Kind are very pernicious. They corrupt the Notions of Religion; - They give Men unworthy Opinions of God; and lead them to imagine that other Beings, the Stars, or even mere Names, such as Chance or Fate, share with God in the Government of the World.

See No. 117 of the Spectator.

Let not the *Creaking* of a *Raven*, or the *Crossing* of a *Hare*, &c. trouble your Repose; He is ill acquainted with himself, who does not know his Fortune better than these Creatures. If Evil follows, it is the Punishment of our Superstition, & not the fulfilling of their Portent.

to chastise the Curiosity, and cross the Predictions of these vain Pretenders.

"Thus saith the Lord that made thee; - I am the Lord, that frustrateth the Tokens of Liars, & maketh Diviners mad; that turneth Wise-Men backward, and maketh their Knowledge foolish."

As he also, (in Scripture,) threatens those who consult them, and that, because in it they "depart from the living and omniscient God," to trust in uncertain Tokens, and lying Vanities. (A)

Let

(A) *Tu nē quā fieris, (scire Nefas,) quem mihi, quem tibi,*

Finem Dii dederint. — — — Nec Babilonios

Tentaris Numeras. — — —


The Desire of knowing future Events, is one of the strongest Inclinations in the Mind of Man. An Ability, indeed, of fore-seeing probable Accidents is what, in the Language of Men, is called Wisdom and Prudence, but not satisfied with the Light that Reason holds out, Mankind have endeavoured to penetrate more compendiously into Futurity. Magick, Oracles, Omens, Lucky-Hours, and the various Arts of Superstition, owe their Rise to this powerful Cause. As this Principle is founded in Self-Love, every Man is fure to be solicitous, in the first place, about his own Fortune, - the Course of his Life, - and the Time and Manner of his Death.

If we consider that we are Free-Agents, we shall discover the Absurdity of such Inquiries. One of our Actions which we might have performed or neglected, is the Cause of another that succeeds it, and so the whole Chain of Life is linked together. Pain, Poverty or Infamy, are the natural Product of vicious and intemperate Acts; as the contrary Blessings are of good ones; so that we cannot suppose our Lot to be determined without Impiety. A great Enhancement of

Serm. XXV.

Pleasure

because the Power of Beings superior to us, is great and unknown; vain and superstitious Men have therefore in all Ages been too apt to be seduced with Imaginations of the Possibility of such Discoveries.

From prudent Collections, &c.  (under)

From prudent Collections and Observations, probable Conjectures may be made of what will happen in some Cases; but there are no certain Means in order to it, but divine Revelation only.

Whoever takes upon him to fore-tell, (except in Cases in which the divine Revelation is concerned,) arrogates to himself that which is the Prerogative of the Deity.

¶ We need not, therefore, marvel that God delights to

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Serm. XXV.

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Let us therefore, refer future things to God, who only knows them : Let us trust him with all Events, and cast all our Care upon him.

When

Pleasure arises from it's being unexpected ; and Pain is doubled by being fore-seen .

Upon all these , and several other Accounts, we ought to rest satisfied in the Portion bestowed on us ; to adore the Hand that hath fitted every thing to our Nature , and hath not more displayed his Goodness in our Knowledge, than in our Ignorance.

We ought not to pry too curiously into Futurity , which God has concealed from us . This is an Error which weak and distrustful Minds are apt to fall into . The *Gentiles* were not so inexcusable in it, "who knew not God ;" but, for *Christians* to apply themselves to such as practise the Arts of Divination , for revealing Secrets and fore-telling things to come, is to expose themselves as a Prey to Impostors , (see No. 130 of the *Spectator* , with No. 305.) and to dishonour the true God , who has favoured them with a clear Manifestation of himself, by attributing to Demons , and their pretended Agents , that Knowledge which peculiarly belongs to him.

It is not unworthy Observation, that superstitious Inquiries into future Events prevail more or less , in Proportion to the Improvement of liberal Arts & useful Knowledge in the several parts of the World. Accordingly we find , that magical Incantations remain in *Lapland* : in the more remote part of *Scotland* they have their Second-Sight ; and several of our own Country Men have seen Fairies . In *Asia* this Credulity is strong ; and the greatest Part of the refined Learning there consists in the Knowledge of Amulets , Talismans , occult Numbers, and the like. And among Christians , it is observable, that those always who have the least Knowledge of God, and least Trust in his Providence, and least Understanding in the true System and Powers of Nature , have the greatest Confidence in groundless Pretences ; and unvarraatable Methods of pursuing Knowledge.

It matters not, that the Pretences to supernatural Ways of knowing things, are commonly mere Cheat and Fraud ; it is a Degree of

(under)

this

When we have used our best Endeavours, (viz) Prudence, Wisdom, and Diligence, for our Supply and Security for the Future, then let us leave the rest to our "Heavenly Father, who knoweth whereof we have need."

When-ever we are solicitous about future things, we take God's proper Work out of his Hands, and ourselves usurp the Government of the World.

"Surely in this we take too much upon us, who are but of Yesterday, and know nothing; know not what a Day, what an Hour may bring-forth."

Let us, therefore, mind our present Duty and proper Employ, and leave Events to God. "Secret things belong unto the Lord, the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong to Us, and to our Children for ever, that we may do all the Words written therein." Let us do our Duty, and commit the rest to God in well-doing.

In this World we are in a mixed State, which is made-up of Good and Evil, of Happiness and Misery; what is good and necessary for us to know, is revealed; this is our Duty; but in great Wisdom and abundant Kindness to Mankind, God hath reserved the rest from us.

Let us, therefore, use all wise Means to seek Good, and prevent the Evil, at least what we can of it, till Misery come.

Serm. XXV.

Let

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It is not unworthy Observation, that superstitious Inquiries into future Events prevail more or less , in Proportion to the Improvement this Sin , if Encouragement be given to such false Pretences. And to pretend to know things by the *Stars* , which introduces Fatality, and destroys Religion , is not much different from pretending to know them by Arts that have worse Names.

" Divinations, and, &c. (under)

" Divinations , and Sooth-Sayings and Dreams are vain ; - who so regardeth them is like him that catcheth at a Shadow , & followeth after the Wind," " Let us, therefore, restrain all Desire of penetrating further than is allowed us , into that dark and unknown Region ; for Futurity belongs to God.

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Serm. XXV.

Let

Let us not go-forth to meet it, for at all Times
 "sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof."

Let us not anticipate the Evils of to-morrow,
 and take present Possession of distant Danger. (A)

Let us cast our Care upon Him who hath pro-
 mised to care for us; for, "the Lord is a God of
 Knowledge, and knoweth whereof we have need;"
 "He is a God of knowledge, & by him all Actions
 are weighed."

(A) *Quid prodest Mala accersere; et præsens Tempus, futuri Metu,
 perdere? — Stultum est, quoddammodo forsitan futurus Miser, esse jam Mife-
 rum. — Cui semper aliquis Terror impendeat, Nihil ei beatum; Is nec
 Epularum, nec Somni Dulcedinem, experitur.*

Fear without Hope, turns to Despair.

SERMON XXVI.

Of the Wisdom of God.

Pſalm cxlvii. 5. "His Wiſdom is infinite."

THEſe Words, as they confirm to us the Attribute of God's Wiſdom; ſo do they, (by the Partiele of Affirmation going before them,) reſpect alſo his Omnipotence, juſt before expreſſed.

The holy Pſalmiſt, (full of the Perfections of the Moſt-High,) is not content with the barely making-mention only of One of the Perfections of God; but, as it were, ſurcharged with the deepeſt Impreſſions of his all-glorious Eſſence, voluminouſly pours-forth, one upon another, the infinite Perfections of his Nature.

"Great is our Lord, and great is his Power; yea, & his Wiſdom is infinite." Where both his Majeſty and Omipotence are expreſſed, & again confirmed, together with his infinite Wiſdom.

The Words before us, (the former being already Conſidered, (A) confine me to the latter of them

(A) Sermon XXIII.

[viz.]

[viz.] the infinite Wisdom of the Deity.

"His Wisdom is infinite."

Wisdom is the right Use or Exercise of Knowledge, (A) and differs from Knowledge, as the Use of a Power or Faculty differs from the Faculty itself. (B)

Tis, therefore, in the Divine Nature a distinct Attribute from that of Knowledge: - And as such I shall accordingly consider it in the following Discourse, in which I shall show,

First, What we are to understand by Wisdom in general, and what it more particularly imports when applied to God.

II. The Extensiveness of it. And then,

III. Confirm it. After which, I shall,

IV. In the fourth and last Place, see what Uses and Improvements can be made from the Whole.

First, Of the Import of the word, Wisdom;
more

(A) See Note (A) page 274.

(B) Knowledge and Wisdom are different Qualities, and must therefore, be considered as distinct Attributes in the Deity; Tho' in Him, the One is justly inferred from the Other; and the same Arguments which prove his Intelligence in general, prove him also to be truly Wise.

more particularly, when applied to God.

Infinite Wisdom and perfect, is to know always the best End, to see always the fittest Means that will produce that End, to understand exactly how to apply those Means to accomplish that End, and to have always a right and invariable Inclination or Will to act accordingly. In a word,

Wisdom, (however taken, or to whomsoever applied,) is the Skill to chuse the best things, & to pursue them, by the most proper and successful Means. (A) This

(A) Wisdom, in any Agent, is estimated by his Approbation of such Ends, as in the Judgment of the Person forming the Estimation, are most agreeable to his Nature, and an invariable Pursuit of those Ends by the best and most effectual Means: for, tho a Man may become learned by *another's* Learning; yet, he can never be Wise but by *his own* Wisdom.

That Man only, who takes the Measures, and steadily adheres to them which have the strictest Connection, not with the Gratification of a particular Appetite or Passion, but his own true, most extensive and complete Felicity, or with the greatest Publick-Good, is to be acknowledged a Wise-Man. He who acts upon lower and inconsistent Views, does not deserve that Character. But,

The Question is, how shall we judge concerning the Ends, or Designs of the Deity, so as with Understanding to pronounce him Wise? Can we pretend to know what is, or what is not, becoming the Dignity and Perfection of his Nature? Or, shall we make the Instincts planted in our Minds for the Purposes of our Being, a Standard by which to examine his Actions, and pass a Judgment upon them?

It is answered, that tho' the divine Perfections do infinitely surpass our Understanding, and we cannot take upon us to judge, as

Serm. XXVI.

from

This is the very highest Excellency of all human Wisdom, nearly resembling the Wisdom of God; only with this Difference, that as Man acts thus prudently for Self-Advantage, God doth not. Self-Interest can never be the Wisdom of that God who ever was, and ever will be happy in the Enjoyment of his own Perfections, being incapable either of

Addition

from a complete Knowledge of them, by what Views they may require to be pursued; yet, there are some things which we cannot possibly help thinking worthy of every intelligent Nature.

Our Minds are so constituted that we necessarily approve and admire Goodness; and the Being who appears in his Counsels to have intended, and by his Actions to promote the most extensive Happiness of other Beings which are capable of it, we must judge to have the first and most essentially requisite Qualifications of a Wise-Agent.

But, tho' we have not such a Knowledge of the divine Perfections, and of the Nature and Reason of things, as to qualify us to judge, *a priori*, what is fittest for him to do; yet, by observing the mutual Relations & Harmony of things which he has made, and the Aptitude of some, as Means, to answer others as the Ends of them, we may collect, what he did intend, & by it discern the Wisdom of the whole Constitution. Indeed,

It is impossible for any finite Understanding to penetrate into the Depths of his Designs, or take-in the intire Scheme of his Administration. We know not what remote and very important Purposes may be served by his Works, beyond all the Views which fall under our Observation; for, "Who hath known the Mind of the Lord? or who, being his Counsellor, hath taught him?" But even by such a partial Observation as our limited Capacity can reach to, we may be able to trace the Marks of excellent Understanding in some of the Ways of God, & from thence must reasonably conclude that perfect Wisdom governs the whole.

Addition, so, or Diminution from them, being in, and from himself infinitely perfect and all-sufficient.

His Wisdom, therefore, as it respects us, must consist in choosing what is best for us, and in prescribing the best Means for the Advancement of our Happiness, and in the removing what is evil and pernicious to us. For,

As the Knowledge of God implies his Understanding of things; so his Wisdom, the Skill of ordering & disposing of them aright to the best Ends and Purposes; the Skill of making and governing all things, & of administering them, "in Number, Weight, and Measure."

The Knowledge of God rather considers things absolutely & in themselves; whereas the latter, the Wisdom of God considers rather the Respects and Relations of things, looks upon them under the Notions of Means and Ends. Accordingly we describe them thus:

The Knowledge of God is a perfect Comprehension of the Nature of all things, with their Qualities, Powers and Circumstances; whereas, the Wisdom of God is a perfect Comprehension of the Respects and Relations of things, one to another; of their Harmony or Opposition, their Fitness or Un-fitness to such or such Ends.

In this Manner is the Wisdom of God exercised, secretly conducting, & sweetly ordering all things.

Serm. XXVI.

Secondly

Secondly, I am to show the Extensiveness of it.
 "His Wisdom is infinite."

Indeed, so great is his Perfection in this, that in many Places in Holy Scripture, He is stiled as singularly possessed of it; as, "the Only-Wise God;" the highest and most complete Wisdom of Man in no way bearing any Respect unto him.

There are, indeed, some Perfections in God which are incommunicable to the Creatures, as Independency, Eternity, &c.

These God only possesses, and they are to be attributed to Him alone. God only is independent and eternal. But,

There are others, of which the Creatures may have some faint Shadow or Resemblance, as Holiness and Goodness, Power and Dominion, Wisdom, Knowledge, & the like; yet, because he hath them not as God hath, without Mixture, Measure, or Limit, they are, therefore, in Scripture ascribed to God alone. Thus,

Because "none, (as Hannah saith,) is holy as the Lord," it is said, "Thou only art holy;" and, tho' there be many who have Power and Dominion in the World, yet is he stiled "the only Potentate." And tho' there be many good and wise Men in the World, yet our Saviour saith "there is none good but God;" and the Apostle stiles God, "the Only-Wise." This

This being premised, I shall speak of it under these two Respects in God :

First, As he is originally and independently wise

Secondly, As being eminently & transcendently so.

Though Wisdom is to be found in some Creatures, as being one of those Attributes that are communicable ; yet is God said to be "the only-wise God," as being so originally and independently, and also eminently and transcendently ; the greatest Wisdom of the Creature being nothing either in Opposition or Comparison to the Wisdom of God, which is perfect and infallible ; As,

First, God only is originally and independently wise ; he derives it from none, and all derive it from him ; for, as is his Nature , so is his Wisdom, "the same Yesterday, to Day, and For-Ever."

"Who, (saith the Prophet,) hath directed the Spirit of the Lord , or, being his Counsellor, hath taught him ?" God challengeth any Creature to come-forth and say, that he hath given Wisdom, or any other Perfection to God : No, all Creatures that are Partakers of it, derive it from God ; for, "the Lord giveth Wisdom," + "God giveth Wisdom and Knowledge : " — "He giveth Wisdom to the Wise, and Knowledge to them that have Under-

Serm. XXVI.

standing

standing." — "He layeth-up sound Wisdom for the righteous, and is a Buckler to them that walk uprightly." But,

Secondly, God is eminently and transcendently so: "His Wisdom is infinite."

This follows from the former. For, if God be the Fountain of Wisdom, Wisdom must be eminently in him: "He that planted the Ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the Eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth Man Knowledge, shall not he know? In like manner.

We may reason concerning all the other Attributes of God, that if he communicates them, he is, and must be, much more eminently possessed of them himself; the greatest Wisdom of the Creatures being nothing in Opposition to the Wisdom of God; nothing in Comparison to it. As first,

Nothing in Opposition to it, "He taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness." "He is wise in Heart, & mighty in Strength, who is like unto him?" — "who hath hardened himself against Him, and prospered?" For, "There is neither Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel against the Lord:" for, "He destroys the Wisdom of the wise, and by foolish things doth he confound them." Again,

Nothing

Nothing in Comparison to it. — We need not here certainly instance in the Folly of wicked men, and worldly; & the imperfect Degrees of Wisdom which are to be found in good Men, in Wisdom's own Children. The Wisdom of God needs not these Foils to set it off.

The Wisdom of Man in Innocency, or of the highest Angels in Heaven, bears no Proportion to the unerring and infinite Wisdom of God.

Our wisdom is as nothing, in Comparison of Divine Wisdom; for, after all our Pretences to it, "We are but of Yesterday, and know nothing." Even those holy Angels, who so excell in Wisdom, (that, "to be wise as an Angel of God," is a proverbial Expression of the highest Wisdom amongst men;) even those holy Angels are foolish in his Sight; for, "He charges his Angels with Folly."

With Folly, not like the Follies of vain Men, but with such Imperfections as are comparatively Folly in the Eyes of Him, who alone is the Perfection of Wisdom. (A) Holy

(A) The Understandings of the Angels, tho' vastly large, are not infinite; their great natural Capacity is improved to a very high Measure of Knowledge, by their standing always in the Presence of God, and receiving his Instructions. Yet,

It is insufficient for the Government of the World, and the Direction of it's Affairs, which God has reserved in his own Hands; committing nothing to the Contrivance of his ablest Ministers, who are only employed to execute his Orders, because of their Imperfection in Wisdom.

Serm. XXVI.

Holy Job, upon a full Enquiry after Wisdom, concludes, that it belongs to God, and that he only is perfectly possessed of it.

"Where, (says he,) shall Wisdom be found? and where is the Place of Understanding?" In such an eminent and transcendent Degree, it is not to be found, or met with, in any of the Creatures; God only hath it: "God knoweth the Place thereof."

"His Wisdom, then, is infinite." This I am now to prove: which I shall do,

First, From the Dictates of Natural Light, or Reason. And then,

Secondly, From Scripture, or divine Revelation.

That God must, of Necessity, be infinitely Wise is necessarily inferred from the other absolute Perfections of his Nature.

If he be every where present; and wherever he is present, there is Activity which cannot be resisted, and Intelligence which cannot be misled or imposed upon: - If he is absolutely Omniscient, knowing not only things which now are, with the greatest Exactness, even the most secret Thoughts of intelligent Beings, but also all things which shall be produced, whether by necessary or free Causes; If he alone be the Original Cause and Author of all things,

things, and knows what each of their Powers and Faculties can produce; seeing, at one View, all the possible Circumstances and Dispositions of things; all their mutual Relations & Dependencies; all their possible Compositions or Divisions, their Variations and Changes, their Fitness and Suitableness each to certain respective Ends and Purposes: Beholding all these things at once, it is evident, he cannot but of Necessity always know, without Possibility of Error, what is the best and properest End in all the possible infinite Cases, or Methods of disposing things; and, having no wrong Inclination possibly to change his Will, any more than Opposition possibly to withstand his Power, it is plain, he will always actually effect what, in right and reason, is fittest to be done, and will accomplish it accordingly.

Another general Argument to prove the Wisdom of God, is taken from the faint and imperfect Images of it, which are in some of the Creatures; and which must be derived "from the Father of Lights," himself, therefore, possessed of that Perfection in the highest Degree. — Intelligence in the Effect is a clear Evidence of it Originally in the Cause; tho of a superior Kind.

Since God only hath "put Wisdom into the inward

ward Parts, & given Understanding to the Heart; all the Measures of Wisdom, therefore, which any created and finite Beings can arrive to, must needs be inferior to his; being ever dependent upon him. Our very Capacity of Improvement is derived from him, the Means are under the Direction of his Providence, and the Success depends upon his good Pleasure; - and, our Increase, as it is limited in it's Degrees, by the Will of him who hath determined the Measures of Perfection to which we can arrive; so it, therefore, implies an Imperfection from which the first Cause is absolutely free, whose Wisdom, (as all the other Excellencies of his Nature,) is incapable of any Addition or Diminution. But further,

And, what will equally shew it, is, the Blemish which the Want of this would occasion, should we deny it to God: This I shall manifest, by shewing the Absurdity & Inconveniency of the contrary.

The contrary is an Imperfection, is both a Defect and a Disgrace, and argues many other Imperfections; therefore, Wisdom belongs to God.

Among Men Folly is looked-upon as the greatest Defect; it is accounted a greater Reproach than even Vice and Wickedness; as, on the contrary,
Wisdom

Wisdom is the highest Perfection, next to Holiness and Goodness; it hath the Ascendency over every thing else,

Reason tells us, tho the Scripture had not said it, that Wisdom excells Folly, as much as Light doth Darkness." But further,

The Denial of this Perfection to God would argue many other Imperfections; it would be an universal Blemish to the Divine Nature, and would darken all his other Perfections.

It would weaken the Power of God. - How impotent & ineffectual would Power be without Wisdom; What irregular things would it produce; What an untoward Combination of Effects would there be, if infinite Power should act without the Guidance and Direction of infinite Wisdom!

It would eclipse the Providence of God; for, there can be no Counsel, no Fore-cast, nor orderly Government of the World without Wisdom.

The Goodness & Mercy, the Truth & Justice of God, could not shine with that Lustre, were it not for his Wisdom, which illustrates these with so much Advantage: indeed, scarce could be, seeing it is from the Design thro which they are perform'd, that they receive all their Merit & Advantage.

But, The most obvious Proof of the Wisdom of
Serm. XXVI. God

God, (& to attentive Minds it is fully convincing,) is, by his Works of Creation and Providence, in which his Wisdom shines eminently.

It is evident, beyond all rational Contradiction, that the World was made, and is governed by Design; and that the Appearances of Nature, and the Series of Events which we observe, cannot be accounted for, without supposing Intelligence in the universal Cause.

— It would be too extensive a Field to enter here into all the various and manifold Works of God, so far as they are known, in Proof of the Attribute before us. However, some small Consideration of them is necessary to this Purpose. And here,

God's originally making all things in Heaven & Earth, & disposing them in the Order in which they appear; — his preserving them all, and governing them, in the way which is most suitable to their several Natures; and so, as they may best answer the Ends of their Being, These are evident Proofs of Wisdom in Him.

They are made so, as to have a visible, mutual Relation to each other, with the most exquisite Skill and Contrivance, and plainly discover that the Whole is under the Direction of One ruling Counsel.

Set — Inanimate things are upheld by the Power of God, and directed in their Motions, constantly and uniformly, to serve particular Purposes: Sensative Beings have a suitable Provision made for the Support of their Lives, and are governed by Instincts, which determine them to pursue the proper Ends of their Nature: and Rational Agents have Laws given them for regulating their Conduct, and are furnished with proper Motives of Action, by the Influence of which they are directed, freely & with Understanding, to pursue the proper Ends of their Being.

Upon a general Survey of these Works of God, there appears an obvious Congruity in the Whole, and a designed Subserviency of some to others. (A)

It is evident that the Motions of the Heavenly Bodies, & the constant uniform Influence of them in the various Productions upon our Globe, are under such a Direction as to answer the End of sustaining a Multitude of living things in their regular Successions; Animals are under an apparent Economy, whereby they are rendered useful to one another, and all of them subordinated to Man. Now,

Even

(A) Compare this with Genesis 1. 14 — 18. ditto 22 — 30.

Serm. XXVI.

Even upon such a slight and general View, we have a clear Discovery of infinite divine Wisdom.

And, The greater Variety there is in any System, (which must all be within the Comprehension of the Mind that formed it,) provided there appears Unity of Design and regular Contrivance, the larger still we must consider the Understanding to be.

How vast, then, must the Comprehension of that Providence be, which takes under it's Guidance the whole Heavens and the Earth, with all things that are in them, - which conducts the Motions of the Celestial-Orbs; yet, without neglecting the meanest Animals, or minutest Matter, on the Earth, and so adjusts all the Parts of this stupendous Fabrick, that whatever Changes any of them may undergo, their Correspondence to each other is uniformly maintained, with the Harmony of the Whole.

Especially, The Variety of Kinds, yet more than the Multitude of Individuals, properly disposed, demonstrates the Wisdom of the Creator & supreme Governor of the World.

How adorable is that Wisdom, which has displayed itself marvelously in the whole Gradation of Being; - which shines conspicuously, not only adjusting, with the utmost Exactness, the Mechanism of the material World; but has formed intirely different
and

and superior Kinds, to whose Nature and Condition of Being, the Methods of his Providence are as well accommodated as to others.

The Constitution and Form of Government, under which intelligent Creatures are placed, is, at least, as clear a Manifestation of the divine Wisdom, as the Frame and Direction of the corporeal System. And, (which is most worthy of our Observation to the present purpose,) these essentially different Kinds are most conveniently disposed of, with Relation to each other. Spirit and Body are united in the same human Composition; and as the System is distinguished in it's Formation by the Creator's Skill; it is as much distinguished by the Administration of his Providence.

From Man there is a Descent, (viz. as to the Degrees of their Perfection,) in the Works of God which we are best acquainted with.

The next inferior Rank are the Brutal-Species; and among them a beautiful Variety; some making a much more considerable Figure than others in the Animal-Kingdom, - some more eminently useful than others.

From them the Perfection of the Animal-Life lessens by various descending Degrees, till it comes

so near to the Vegetable-World as scarcely to be distinguished from it.

Of Vegetables there are as various Kinds ; all of them ministring to sensitive Beings, as to a superior Order : and these latter are directed to the proper Use of them by particular Instincts : and inanimate things are constantly so governed , as to serve the Purposes of Vegetation.

This Order is maintained amidst an infinite Diversity. And,

As there is a Scale of Being appointed by the great designing Author ; so there is a Subordination of Use, the Lower still serving the Higher , till we ascend to Man , the chief of the Works of God here on Earth. Now,

Who that attends to this obvious Face of Nature, and the daily Administration of Providence , can help acknowledging not only Design, (i.e) the Being of God ; but perfectly wise Counsel, discovered in the admirable Æconomy of all things , as far as his Works come within our Knowledge.

A more particular and accurate Inquiry into all these things would set the Evidence of divine Wisdom still in a clearer and stronger Light ; showing not only that the Universe, considered as one intire Work

Work, discovers wonderful Counsel in the Constitution of it, having all it's Parts for several Uses regularly disposed and fitted to each other; but every particular Being which can be considered as a separate intire System and compleat in itself, carries in it's Frame the clearest Manifestations of it's Author's perfect Understanding.

"The Lord" not only "by Wisdom stretched out the Heavens, & established the Earth by his Discretion;" but, in the Constitution of every single terrestrial and celestial Body, is manifested the exquisite Skill of their designing intelligent Maker.

As to the Celestial, they are too far distant for our minute Observation; and human Science is principally conversant about their Magnitude, Distance & regular Motions, in which the modern Improvements of astronomical Learning open a surprising Scene, displaying the Wisdom of God beyond what appears to the first Views of an uninstru-cted Spectator.

In the Composition of Bodies, whose Properties are better known to us, as Air, Earth, Water, and Animals, and especially the human Body; in all of these and each of them, the manifold Wisdom of the Creator is discovered. — And here also,

It is worthy of our Observation, that the Progress of Learning has most eminently tended to establish the Foundations of Religion; for, the Discoveries which have been lately made in Natural-History, Philosophy and Anatomy, have greatly illustrated and confirmed the important Article we are now considering,

It is not convenient in this short Discourse to descend to Particulars, even which are commonly known. — But this we may venture to affirm that it shows an amazing Infatuation in any Man, (who has not spent his Life in the utmost Obscurity, entirely unacquainted with that Knowledge of Nature which is the Subject of common Conversation in this Age, and these Parts of the World,) not to be convinced, that as “the Works of God are manifold; so in Wisdom he has made them all.” (A)

Thus all the Works of God have the Evidences of his Wisdom clearly stamp’d upon them, whether we view them in the Whole, or in Parts; and the more diligently we apply Ourselves to this Inquiry, the more we shall be satisfied that the Character of “INFINITE WISDOM,” justly belongs to him. But,
II.

(A) He that would see more of this Reasoning, may consult the IX. Sermon in this Work, Vol. I. page 220. &c. And also the first Sermon of Vol. IV. on the Creation.

II. This Article, thus eminently illustrated by Nature, is also especially confirmed by Scripture.

And here, The Whole almost that hath been already said in the Beginning of this Discourse, in Explication of the Attribute before us, might not here again be unaptly repeated, in as much as every Passage of Scripture explaining, is also equally assenting to, & confirming the same. But,

To forego these, we want not others as fully replete in Confirmation of it.

Job says, that "God is wise in Heart;" — "is mighty in Strength and Wisdom." And,

Daniel, "Blessed be the Name of God for ever and ever, for Wisdom and Might are his." And,

Sirach, "All Wisdom cometh from the Lord, and is with him forever."

Hither we may refer those Texts which attribute Wisdom to God in a singular & peculiar Manner; as, in St. Jude, and the Epistle to the Romans, and in the Text; where it is applied to him, in a singular and infinite Degree; & those which speak of God, as the Fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his Creatures, as in Daniel, and in the Epistle of St. James.

Not to mention others, which speak of the Wisdom of God in the Creation of the World, in the Providence and Government of it; and above all,

Serm. XXVI.

in

in the Redemption of Mankind by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. — All, and each of which are a full & sufficient Manifestation of the infinite Wisdom of God.

"There is one Wise, then, & greatly to be feared; the Lord sitting upon his Throne. He created her, and saw her, and numbered her, and poured her out upon all his Works. She is with all Flesh according to his Gift, and he hath given her to them that love him."

SERMON XXVII.

Treaties of Williams. We should, therefore, be

2. "The Commission, as well as the Department of Justice,"

Plalm cxlvii. 5 "His Wisdom is infinite."

Having already explained and confirmed the Bo

(2) માનવિય-સાધક વચ્ચેના સંબંધો સુધારવાની જરૂર

can be made from what hath been thus laid down

Is God the Fountain and Original of all...

2. Hence, into your letter, whether to repair for the

obtaining of it, even to this All-Wise God, "who

Since all spiritual wisdom cometh from above,

doth St. James direct us: "If any Man lack Wil-

It is the Spirit of Wisdom only, which inspire

pray, as St. Paul doth for his Ephesians, "that God

would give us the Spirit of Wisdom, and of Revelation in the Knowledge of himself?

It is "the Blessed Jesus, in whom are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom." We should, therefore, request that he may be made to us both Wisdom and Sanctification, as well as Righteousness, & Peace."

"It is the Word of God which is able to make us wise unto Salvation;" we should, therefore, pray in the Words of holy David, "that God would open our Eyes, that we may see the wondrous things of his Law."

The Reason why so many lack Wisdom, (i.e) true Wisdom, is, because they think they are already sufficiently wise; But,

If any Man, (sensible of his Defects and Imperfection,) cometh to God, "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not."

Men are unwilling that others should be as wise as themselves; but God's Goodness makes him willing to impart Wisdom freely. "He giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not." But,

Secondly, The Reason why we should thus apply to God for Wisdom, is sufficiently evident from the Apostle's saying, that "the Way of Man," (i.e) the Knowledge of the Way he should walk in, "is not from himself." "It is not in Man that walketh to direct his Steps." As

As we are, therefore, insufficient of ourselves, it is not only our Duty, but our Interest also, and "reasonable Service" to apply to God for Direction in all our Ways.

And by our hearty Affection to, and fervent Desire of saving Knowledge, we shew how much we value, and how earnest we are for her; "This Wisdom which is from above," "will descend upon us," & be our best Instructor, & surest Guide; according to Solomon: "When Wisdom entereth into thine Heart, and Knowledge is pleasant to thy Soul," (i.e.) when it hath taken full Possession of our Heart and Affections, so that we find an inward Pleasure and Satisfaction in walking in the ways of Piety and Virtue; "then Discretion shall preserve us, and Understanding keep us."

Let us, therefore, "get Wisdom, and with all our getting, get Understanding, and do our utmost to attain unto it. (A) For, by so doing, our Steps shall

(A) Reason is the most raised Faculty of Human-Nature: No Persons, therefore, better deserve the Name of MEN, than such as allow their Reason a full Employment; No Gilt so exquisite as that of the MIND. They are but little better than Brutes, who can patiently & contentedly bear the Imprisonment of their Intellects in a Dungeon of Ignorance.

If you desire Knowledge only to KNOW, it is Curiosity: If to be KNOWN, it is Vanity: But, if to EDIFY, it is Charity: Or that

shall not be, straitened, and when we run, we shall not stumble."

The Inducements I shall offer to engage us to seek the true and spiritual Wisdom which is from above, will arise,

First, From the Necessity of it; as it can only be derived from the God of Wisdom. For,

"The Lord only, (as saith Solomon,) giveth Wisdom; out of his Mouth cometh Knowledge and Understanding;" so that without the divine Assistance all our Pains and Study to attain it will be ineffectual.

This was so evident to many of the Heathens from the Light of Nature; that they declared that "all true Wisdom was inspired by God." The Stoics only denied it. But of these Men the Apostle truly saith, "professing themselves to be Wise, they became Fools." Then only are we in the most likely way to become truly wise, when we repair to that God who is the Giver of it, with a deep Sense
of

we may be EDIFIED, it is then Wisdom indeed.

There are two Sorts of Curiosities; The First proceeds from Interest, and is a Desire to learn things that may be useful & beneficial: The Other ariseth from Pride, and is a Desire of being Wiser than our Neighbours. But, Philosophy is then only valuable, when it serves for a Law of Life, and not for the Ornament of Science.

of our Want of it; and of our Insufficiency to obtain it without his Assistance; for then, when we own and acknowledge our Dependence on him for it, we shall most likely give him the Glory due.

Secondly, We have great Encouragement thus to address God for it, both from his Bounty, and the gracious Promise that he hath made to those who seek to him for it.

First, From the Bounty of the Donor: "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not."

God freely imparts his divine Wisdom without any other Price than that of a Soul willing to receive it, and careful to improve it to the Glory of the Giver. (A)

Though our former Follies and Misapplication of the Talents which he hath already vouchsafed us, may render us unworthy of his future Favours, yet, if we now become truly willing to receive and improve this Wisdom to his Glory, & to the Welfare of our Souls, he is still ready to impart it "liberally to us, and upbraideth us not" with our former Follies. Indeed,

Secondly,

(A) Of all Parts of Wisdom, PRACTICE is the best.

Socrates was esteemed the wisest Man in his Time, because he turned his acquired Knowledge into Morality, and aimed at Goodness more than Greatness.

Serm. XXVII.

Secondly, If we ask him duty for it; and seek it with that Diligence & Concern which the Necessity and Importance of it requires, he stands engaged by Promise to confer it.

"Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away, yet she is easily seen of them that love her, and found of such as seek her; for she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her; she sheweth herself favourably unto them in the Way, & meeteth them in every Thought." Again,

"If thou criest after Knowledge, & liftest up thy Voice for Understanding, if thou seekest her as Silver, and searchest for her as for hidden Treasure, then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, & find the Knowledge of the Most High. For the Lord giveth Wisdom; out of his Mouth cometh Knowledge and Understanding; He layeth up Wisdom for the righteous. He is a Buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the Paths of Judgment, and preserveth the Way of his Saints: Then shalt thou understand Righteousness, & Judgment, & Equity, yea, & every good Path; then Discretion shall preserve thee, and Understanding keep thee;" (i.e) if we express such a Desire of it, as Men do after that which they most want, then shall we most certainly obtain it: (i.e) "when Wisdom entereth into our Heart, and Knowledge is pleasant unto us."

Hence

Hence it is that St. James requires all those who would enjoy this Wisdom, to ask it of God "in Faith, nothing wavering," or with a firm Belief that God will certainly afford it, (in such Measure and Proportion as he sees fit, and as we shall be deserving of it,) to all his Servants, who shall thus sincerely desire it of him.

This Condition is also requisite for our own Comfort and Advantage; for, he that doubts of this will be divided betwixt Hopes and Fears, and be too apt to quit his Dependence upon God, and to lean to his own Wisdom and Understanding," & so fall under the Power of Temptation. But,

Thirdly, Another Inducement to be thus solicitous for the Enjoyment of true Wisdom, ariseth from the Consideration of the Excellencies of it, and of the glorious Advantages which we shall receive from it's Participation.

Nothing is better, nothing is more excellent than true Wisdom; for this which Solomon, (the Man of Wisdom,) recommends to our Choice, affords, (by way of Eminence,) all that we can desire in Reference either to this Life or a better. For,

Do we desire Length of Life? — "Length of Days is in her Right-Hand." For, "receive her Sayings, and the Years of thy Life shall be many."

Serm. XXVII.

Again

Again, Do we desire that Health, which sweeteneth all the Enjoyments of this present Life, and without which we can take but little Comfort in them? — "She will be Health to thy Navel, and Marrow to thy Bones." Again,

Are we desirous of Riches, or of precious things? "She will give to thine Head an Ornament of Grace: A Crown of Glory shall She deliver to thee." "She is more precious than Rubies, and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her." (A) Again,

Are we athirst for Honour? — "Riches and Honour are with her; yea, durable Riches & Honour." "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she will bring thee to great Honour when thou dost embrace her;"

Lastly, Are we concerned to be happy, as all men chiefly ought to be? "Happy is the man that findeth Wisdom, and the man that getteth Understanding; for the Merchantdize of it is better than the Merchantdize of Silver; & the Gain thereof than fine Gold; for, as "Length of Days is in her Right-Hand;" so "in her Left-Hand are Riches and Honour." — "Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace." — "She is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold on her, and happy is every one that retaineth her." With

(A) See Wisdom, 8, ver. 3 — 9.

With what Earnestness do Men desire, & with what indefatigable Industry do they pursue that human and worldly Wisdom, which only serves some few Interests of this present Life, and then is lost for ever; & which, (in any tolerable Measure,) cannot be enjoyed without much Labour and Fatigue; for, "in much Wisdom," (saith he who had the greatest Portion & Experience of it,) "is much Grief, and he that increaseth Wisdom increaseth Sorrow." Whereas,

The Ways of spiritual Wisdom "are ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace." (A)

All human Wisdom shall decay and perish with us; — "the Wisdom of the Wise shall perish, and their Knowledge shall be done-away." (B) But,

This is the Excellency of true Wisdom, that "it giveth Life," — "Life eternal," to them that have it.

Our human Wisdom may make our Faces shine before

(A) Rectitude of Will is a greater Ornament & Perfection, than Brightness of Understanding: &, to be divinely good, more valuable than any other Wisdom or Knowledge whatever.

(B) It hath been said, that the Sciences produce no Consolation in the Times of Affliction: But, the Knowledge of Christianity is a Comfort both in Adversity, and in the Defect of all other Knowledge.

He that knows what belongs to his Salvation, is sufficiently Wise both as to this World, and a better.

before Men, but will not make the Countenance of God to shine upon us, if alone, or make us more acceptable in his Sight; whereas, by this spiritual Wisdom "we shall find Favour and good Understanding in the Sight both of God and Man:" And,

Lastly, Whereas no man will be accepted or rewarded at the Last-Day for any other Wisdom, "this spiritual Wisdom will make us wise unto Salvation." And surely,

This must be sufficient to convince us, that it is our chief Concern to apply our Hearts to that holy and heavenly Wisdom, whilst we live here, which will hereafter bring to us an everlasting Reward.

Let us, then, labour to partake of the Wisdom of God, so far as it is communicable. For,

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get Wisdom, & with all thy Getting, get Understanding; yea get her, & forget her not." But further,

Is God infinite in Wisdom, in an eminent and transcendent Degree? Then,

Happy are the Souls that have an Interest in him; for, we are hereby secure from all Dangers whatever; not even the Wit of Man, or the Malice of the Devil, being then able to prevail against us; God more transcendently excelling these in Wisdom than Thought can conceive. Let us, therefore,
put

put our Trust and Confidence always in him.

As by the Manifestation of God's Wisdom in the Frame and Constitution of things, we are directed where to apply for Wisdom, as to the Fountain of it; so by the continued Exercise of the same glorious Attribute in his Government of the World we are encouraged to trust in him at all Times and in all Circumstances, if we sincerely endeavour to approve ourselves to him by imitating his moral Perfection, and obeying his Laws, (the only Condition upon which, by the very Constitution of Nature, we can have Confidence towards God;) For, He has the whole Series of Events under his Direction, appointing even the remotest Issues of them; the whole Course of Nature, and all the Vicissitudes of human Affairs are governed by his perfect Reason.

Here then, is a solid Foundation of inward Tranquility to intelligent Creatures, and a Relief under all their Anxieties for the Future. For,

What can a rational Being desire, but that eternal, unerring Reason should direct the Series of Events, and determine what comes to pass?

If in fact, the World be so governed, & our Persuasion of it rests upon solid Grounds, this must be delightful to the human Mind, - a never-failing Spring, of Consolation. — Supposing, (on the contrary,) that there was no such thing as Counsel in

the Government of the Universe, but that all things were guided by blind Chance and Necessity; how must this dissipate the Strength of the Soul, disorder all it's Powers, and fill it with Horror & Disquiet?

The present State, and indeed the whole of Existence, would then be, in the strictest and most proper Sense, (as Job represents the State of Death, (A) "A Land of Darkness, as Darkness itself, and of the Shadow of Death, without any Order, and where the Light is as Darkness." But,

Since it is not so; - since "the only-wise God reigneth, and his Counsel standeth forever, and the Thoughts of his Heart to all Generations, let all the rational Inhabitants of the Earth rejoice, and the Multitude of the Isles be glad before him."

What can give greater Satisfaction or more inward Security to a considerate unprejudiced Mind? For, Upon this Principle, the last Result of all things must be just such as our minds would wish to have them.

It surely must be our highest Wisdom, therefore, to give ourselves up to be governed by his holy Laws, and live by the Directions which he prescribeth for us, as thereby we shall be assuredly guided by unerring Wisdom.

"Trust

50119 Trust in the Lord; therefore, with all thine Heart, and lean not to thine own Understanding: In all thy Ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct thy Paths." Therefore further,

We ought always to acquiesce in the present Disposition of things by Divine Providence, and comply with it's Counsels, as far as we know them.

God's Ways are unsearchable, & his Judgments past finding out. — But, when he is pleased to show his Purposes in particular Events, tho we cannot discern the Reasons of them, and their full Design, it becomes us to submit, not because of his sovereign Dominion, (which, abstracted from the Consideration of his Wisdom, can never produce a rational Resignation, nor satisfy our Understandings any more than unintelligent Fate, the blind Idol of the Atheists;) but because we know he is infinitely Wise, who, in these Instances, declares his Will. — He has, it is true, given us Understanding, and we should use it in the best Manner we can, for the Direction of our Practice.

Prudence however will teach such as are conscious of their own Weakness, to carry it with great Deference to acknowledged, to superior infinite Understanding, & hearken to Instruction. But surely,

The very imperfect Understandings of men
Serm. XXVII. should

should never exalt themselves against the perfect Wisdom which rules the World. Therefore, Where God is pleased to interpose, by disappointing our Desires & breaking our Measures, the humblest Resignation is our unquestionable Duty. And, what He has plainly discovered to be the Design and Appointment of his Providence, we should cheerfully submit to, because we are sure it is Best on the whole: still remembering, (as a first Maxim, and of the utmost Importance,) that, what God has evidently shewn, by the clear Light of our own Reason, to be the proper Ends of our Being, these we ought constantly to pursue, and inviolably adhere to that invariable Rule which he hath given us for the Conduct of Life. Indeed,

We cannot fathom the Depth of his Wisdom, nor know the Secrets of his Counsel; "But, unto Man He hath said; Behold, the Fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil, that is Understanding." Again,

If God only be Wise, in an eminent & transcendent Degree, then let us be humble.

There is no Cause of Boasting, seeing we have nothing but what we have received.

The lowest Instance, the least Specimen of the Divine, outshines the highest Degree of human Wisdom

Wisdom. "The Foolishness of God," (if any thing in the divine Perfections may be so termed,) "is wiser than Men;" therefore, "let not the Wise-Man glory in his Wisdom." But,

Lastly, Great Excellencies, particularly such as we know to be so, & are above our Comprehension, (such as the Wisdom of God is,) are wont to be praised, magnified, and adored. — "all his Works praise him," by manifesting his Wisdom; and we, whom he has made capable of discerning the Characters and Evidences of that Perfection, owe him the Tribute of the highest Honour and Esteem. Power may strike our Minds with Awe, and supreme Majesty make our Hearts tremble; but, it is Wisdom that attracts Veneration. — In whatever Degree any Agent appears to be possessed of this Quality, he is intitled to a proportionable Measure of our Respect. — Wisdom & Folly make the principal Distinction among Men, by which they are held in Reputation or Contempt. — And, Tho the Differences of outward Condition may be often too much regarded, and Men of servile Spirits may flatter the Rich and Great in their Folly, while "the poor Man's Wisdom is despised;" (A) yet the Language of the Heart is different, and true Wisdom

wherever

(A) See Eccl-us, 13. 22, 23.

wherever it is found, necessarily commands our inward Esteem. But,

What is all the Wisdom of Men, or indeed the largest finite Understandings, but an imperfect Shadow, when compared with the intellectual Perfection of the Father of Lights?

We think of the Angels with great Veneration, as a far higher Order of Being, whose superior Excellence consists in, (at least one principal Branch of it is,) a more extensive Knowledge than ours. — But, even this is but a faint Ray derived from “the Father of Lights,” the pure eternal Fountain, who communicates Light in various Measures to the intellectual World, whereby it is animated, directed and fitted to proclaim his Praise, yet suffers no Diminution of his infinite Understanding.

Shall, then, the infinite Wisdom of God, be passed-by, unnoticed, and unobserved by us? God forbid. Rather, let us, (with the Apostle,) give him the Glory due.

As Praise is the noblest Employment of the Mind, so it is a most delightful Exercise: The Soul even partakes of all the intellectual & moral Perfections, which it joyfully celebrates. And, since the Consciousness of Dignity, & the Delight which accompanies it, must always bear a Proportion to the apprehended

prehended Excellency of the Object, the Praise which is given to the Supreme Being, with Understanding and sincere Esteem, must, on this Account, infinitely exceed others.

It is therefore, most becoming such imperfect rational Creatures, as we are, to contemplate the Works of God, with this Design, that we may discern the Manifestations of his Wisdom in them, & by it, excite in ourselves those pious and devout Affections, and that superlative Respect, which are the very Essence of Praise, as a reasonable & moral Service.

If we are sincerely disposed to employ ourselves in this excellent, this comprehensive Duty of praising God, wherein our best Affections join their Force, and all the Springs of manly Pleasure unite in raising the Satisfaction of the Mind, the Means are ready at hand. — The Works of God, in a most amazing and beautiful instructive Variety, present themselves to us with their Manifestations of his Wisdom; they pour their Evidence from all Quarters, & into all the Avenues of the Mind, inviting us to behold perfect Counsel & wise Design, which is the most agreeable Object we can contemplate. There is no part of the Universe to which we can turn our Attention, nor any Species of Beings in it, that

that does not afford us the plainest Discoveries of Divine Skill and Power in their Formation and Economy.

"The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-Work: Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night sheweth Knowledge. — The Beasts of the Field, & the Fowls of the Air teach us, and the Fishes of the Sea declare unto us," that he is perfectly wise, who gave them their Being, and appointed their various Uses, with all the Circumstances of their Condition.

In this View, the Work of the Lord appears honourable and glorious, and it is sought-out of them that have Pleasure therein. They trace the Signatures of Counsel upon it, with the highest Admiration, & their Hearts are filled with Joy & Praise.

A Heart full of such Sentiments will be it's own Instructor in Religion, & needs not be taught from others what Duty it owes, what Love & Gratitude, what Confidence, Obedience and Resignation are due to the Omniscient and All-Wise God.

Some eminent Persons (A) in these last Days have happily employed an uncommon Capacity in searching-out the Works of Nature, and illustrating the

(A) RAY on the Creation. DERHAM: Astro- and Physico-Theology.

the marvellous Displays of Wisdom in them; so that the Subject appears in a quite different Light from what it hath hitherto done, and even brought down to the Level of common Understandings.

What was formerly called Philosophy, (the vain and poor Productions of Impiety, Ignorance and Pride,) was really what the Apostle calls, "the Wisdom, thro which the World knew not God."

But, in these our more-enlightened Days, whatever is worthy to be called Learning, visibly terminates in Religion, as it's last Result, and shows us all things "full of God."

Let us pursue the Method which has been so clearly marked-out to us. — Let those, whose Talents and Leisure enable them, endeavour to build a further Superstructure on the noble Foundation already laid; and, by investigating the Secrets of Nature, (so far as human Understanding can reach,) discern the Counsels of it's Author, that we may give him due Praise. And,

Let them who are unqualified for such an Undertaking, yet study to be acquainted with the useful Discoveries others have made; and by affectionate Meditation on them, feed the pure Flame of rational Devotion in their own Breasts. But,

Above all Kinds of Natural-Knowledge, there is one Branch which may be most profitably improved

to the Purposes of Religion, by contemplating the Wisdom of God in it, (viz) The Philosophy of Human Nature itself, not only, or principally, of the corporeal Part, tho even that is a wonderful Work of God, a most curious Structure, in which divine Wisdom shines conspicuously.

It is, indeed, surprizing that any who have studied the Animal-Constitution & Æconomy, should forget God, it's Maker. — Others, we know, have made many just and pious Reflections upon it, as an admirable Monument of the Creator's Skill and Power, in which he hath shown himself "great in Counsel, and wonderful in Working." But,

What is here chiefly aimed at, is, that we should apply ourselves to the serious Consideration of our inward Fabrick, that of the Mind, by which we are distinguished by the Character of Rational Creatures.

Of all the external Objects we discern, bearing, in a vast Variety, the Marks of the Creator's Intelligence and Power, there is none which bears any Resemblance to this. It has no Shape nor Colour, or any other sensible Quality, yet there is nothing more real, nothing more important to us. — We are conscious of it's various, many of them deeply interesting, Perceptions and Operations, accompa-

nied

and with different Kinds and Degrees of Pleasure and Pain.

This Object, intimately near to us, (for it is that by which we are what we are, our very selves,) will, (in the View of things, we are now considering them,) appear most worthy of our first, and most careful Attention.

To this Purpose, in every View we can take of it, it appears a beautiful Offspring of God's Light, and a noble Production of his Power.

The intellectual and self-determining Faculties, the self-reflecting, authoritative, and controuling Judgment of the Mind upon it's own Dispositions and voluntary Acts, and the Affections to spiritual and moral Objects, Characters and Actions; These are Subjects of Contemplation, to which we meet with Nothing Parallel in the Whole of material Nature. And! When, in Conjunction with them, we consider the other subordinate Powers and Determinations of the human Soul, it's Senses, Appetites and Passions, such as Fear, Hope, Joy, and the like, as the various Ends to which they are designed, and the noble Uses they serve when rightly directed, - What a beautiful Scene is here opened to us, wherein we may entertain ourselves most agreeably, & be furnished with excellent Arguments of Praise to our Great and Wise Creator.

Serm. XXVII.

It

It is a very elegant Description which Solomon gives us of the Excellency of Wisdom, and which every attentive Mind must assent to.

Wisdom is the Breath of God; and a pure Influence flowing from the Glory of the Almighty. — She is the Brightness of the everlasting Light; The unspotted Mirror of the Power of God, and the Image of his Goodness: — Remaining in herself, She maketh all things New; and in all Ages, entering into holy Souls, She maketh them Friends of God, and the Prophets: for, God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. — She is more beautiful than the Sun, and above all the Order of the Stars. — Being compared with Light, She is found before it.” Holy Job is equally express.

“Man knoweth not the Price thereof; It cannot be gotten for Gold, neither shall Silver be weighed for it. — It cannot be valued with Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx, or the Saphir. — The Gold and the Chrystal cannot equal it, and the Exchange of it shall not be for Jewels of fine Gold. — No mention shall be made of Corel or of Pearl, for the Price of Wisdom is above Rubies. — The Topaz of Æthiopia shall not equal it. (A) But,

“Where

(A) Wisdom is a god-like Attribute.

"Where shall Wisdom be found, and where is the Place of Understanding? The Depth, and the Sea, & Destruction, & Death, say it is not in them."

The Effects of it are scattered over all the Works of Nature, and the whole *Æconomy* of Providence, in a beautiful Variety; and a lively Image of it is stamped on Rational Creatures, whom God has taught what is their true Wisdom, (*viz*) "to fear him, and keep his Commandments," - to "fear the Lord, and to depart from Evil;" and to whom he has communicated such an Understanding, as we cannot but account the highest distinguishing Privilege of our Nature, (for who, but the Author of our Being "hath put Wisdom in the inward Parts, and given Understanding to the Heart?") But how much more to be admired, and worthy of our most peculiar Veneration and Esteem, is the eternal Fountain of intellectual Light, who himself only is perfect in Wisdom.

To that pure Intelligence, therefore, - that most perfect Wisdom, to whose Inspiration we owe all our Understanding, which is the Capacity of all our Enjoyments; To that Blessed, underived Spring of

*Ad summum Sapientis uno minor est Jove, dives,
Liber, bonus, aris, pulcher, Rex denique Regum.*

Wisdom excels Folly, as far as Light doth Darkness.

Serm. XXVII,

of Knowledge and Wisdom, let our Minds always give the highest Honour, and pay the most devout Respect, adore him who "commanded the Light to shine out of Darkness, and hath put Wisdom into the Heart," the Image of his own Perfection;

"To God, — Only-Wise, be Glory,
"for ever."

Sermon

Of the Immutability of God.

SERMON XXVIII.

Of the Immutability of God.

Malachi iii. 6. "I am the Lord, I change not."

The Divine Nature, in some Views, attracts our Love; in others, commands our Reverence; in all, is intitled to the highest Attention from the human Mind. - we never elevate our Thoughts, in a proper Manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own Sphere with Sentiments more improved; and if, at any time, his Greatness oppresseth our Thoughts, his moral Perfections always afford us Relief. His almighty Power, his infinite Wisdom and supreme Goodness, are Sounds familiar to our Ears. - In his Immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; & yet, it is this Perfection which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the Divine Nature from the Human; gives complete Energy to all his other Attributes, and entitles it to the highest Adoration. For,

Hence are derived the regular Order of Nature, and the Steadfastness of the Universe.

Hence

Hence flows the unchanging Tenour of those Laws which, from Age to Age, regulate the Conduct of Mankind. — Hence the Uniformity of that Government, & the Certainty of those Promises, which are the Ground of our Trust and Security.

Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering Hopes, and Power would command very imperfect Reverence, if we were left to suspect that the Plans which Goodness had framed, might alter, or that the Power of carrying them into Execution, might decrease.

The Contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable in his Nature and in all his Perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of Instruction, and of Consolation to Man.

“I am the Lord, I change not.”

These Words, if considered with Relation to the Context, are a powerful Motive to engage us to Repentance: God here representing himself to us as a God of Judgment, bearing an unchangeable Hatred to the Workers of Iniquity: and though he, with much Patience, forbears to execute his threatened Judgments, yet will they certainly, in their due Season, fall upon those who rebel against him. But,

It is not so much my Design to speak to these Words in this Light, in the first Place, as it is, to establish

establish from them the Attribute of God's Immutability. However,

That both these Ends may be accomplished, I shall treat on them in the following Order.

First, I shall explain what is meant by God's Immutability. And then,

II. Prove that this Perfection belongs to God.

III. I shall remove such Objections as have been usually brought against it.

Concluding with what Improvements can be made from the whole. And,

First, Of the Import of the Phrase, "the Immutability of God."

The Immutability of God respects both his Nature, his Attributes, and Perfections.

God always is, and was, & to all Eternity will be the same; He undergoes no Changes, either of his Essence, or of his Properties and Perfections. God is always what he was; for, "infinite Perfection alters not."

The Apostle St. James represents this to us under a very elegant Similitude: "Every good and perfect Gift, (says he,) cometh down from the FATHER OF LIGHTS, with whom there is no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning."

Serm. XXVIII.

The

The Comparison is truly elegant; drawn from the Consideration of that, which, in corporeal things, is the least subject to change, [viz] "the Sun shining in the Heavens."

The Sun is the greatest, the most regular, the most stable & constant Dispenser of Light & Heat, & fruitful Influences upon the Face of this inferior World; yet is his Influence varied by different Motions, by Days and Nights, by Winter and Summer, by Clouds and Shadows, and indeed even by Alterations within it's own Body. But,

God, (the Father of spiritual Lights, the Author and Disposer of all good and perfect Gifts, of whose everlasting Brightness the Glory of the Sun, is but a faint Image,) has in him no Uncertainty, nor Alteration of any of his Perfections, "hath no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning." But,

Secondly, for Proof of this.

That God, (in Respect of his Essence,) is absolutely unchangeable, may be proved from hence, because his Being is NECESSARY, and his Essence SELF-EXISTENT. (A) For, whatever NECESSARILY is, as it cannot but be, so it cannot but continue be invariably what it is.

That

(A) See Note (A) page 71 of this Vol.]

That which depends upon nothing, can be affected by nothing, & consequently cannot be changed.

As to those Perfections of his, [viz] his Power, and Knowledge, & Wisdom, with other his Natural Attributes, that they are equally unchangeable is evident, as they flow necessarily from his Essence, and depend not on his Will, because whatever necessarily flows from any Cause or Principle, must likewise, (of Necessity,) be as invariable, as the Cause or Principle from which they necessarily proceed. (A)

Concerning those other Perfections, the Exercise of which depends upon his Will, such as are his Justice

(A) To imperfect Natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every Alteration which they undergo in their Abilities or Dispositions, flows either from internal Defect, or from the Influence of a superior Cause. But, as no higher Cause can bring, from *without*, any Accession to the Divine Nature; so, *within* itself, it contains no Principle of Decay.

The natural Perfections of the Deity, his Knowledge and Power, and Wisdom, not depending even upon his own Will, as they are derived from no other Cause, but included in his Essence itself, must be, like it, invariable. It is impossible they should ever cease to be, or suffer any Diminution, being the essential Characters by which he is what he is: so that they must be, as his Existence, *necessary*, "to Everlasting, as well as *from* Everlasting;" liable to no Influence from without, incapable of any Change within himself, impaired by no Time, nor by any Space or Periods of eternal Duration. For, the same Reason that the self-existent Being was from the Beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so forever.

Serm. XXVIII.

tice, his Veracity, his Goodness, his Mercy, and all other moral Perfections; the absolute Immutability of these is not, indeed, so obvious & self-evident; because they depend on the Unchangeableness not only of his Essence, but of his Will also.

Nevertheless, upon careful Consideration, the Unchangeableness of these likewise will no less certainly appear. Because,

In a Being who always knows what is Right to be done, & can never possibly be deceived, or awed, or tempted, or imposed upon, his general Will and Intention of doing always what is best, and most fit and right to be done, will, (in Reality, though not upon the same Ground of natural Necessity,) yet in Event, and upon the Whole, be as certainly and truly unchangeable as his very Essence itself. (A) The Decrees, the Counsels, the Purposes & Promises of God being all of them the Results of the exactest Justice, and Goodness, and of that Wisdom which fore-sees all possible Circumstances; no unseen Circumstance, therefore, can happen, whereby to move him either to change his Purpose, or to alter his Decree.

The Divine Mind, being liable to no Commotions, must ever be directed by unerring Wisdom. There is no Room for a civil War in the Breast of the Omnipotent. He has no Wants to supply, nor

Foes

(A) The God is a most perfectly free Agent, yet he cannot but do always what is Best and Wisest in the Whole. The Reason is evident; because Perfect Wisdom and Goodness, are as Steady and Certain Principles of Action, as Necessity itself. And an Infinitely Wise and Good Being, indeed with the most perfect Liberty, can no more choose to act in Contradiction to Wisdom & Goodness; than a Necessary Agent can act contrary to the Necessity, by which it is directed. Nothing is greater an Absurdity & Impossibility in Nature, for Infinite Wisdom to choose to do Unwisely, or Infinite Goodness to choose what is not Good; than it would be for absolute Necessity to fail of producing its necessary Effect.

There was, indeed, no Necessity in Nature, that God should at first create such Beings as he has created; nor indeed any Beings at all; nor could he join Himself infinitely Happy, and self-sufficient. There was no Necessity in Nature, that he should preserve and continue Things in Being, after they were created; because he would be self-sufficient without their Continuance; as he was before their Creation. But it was, Fit, and Wise, and Good, that Infinite Wisdom should continue, and Infinite Goodness should continue, in the World. And therefore it was the

Foes to fear; no Appetites to importune, nor Passions to pervert him. Rectitude, therefore, must be his Rule. While his infinite Government steers its Course along the Tide of Eternity, sure and steady will be the Regard to this immutable Point, in the clear calm Region of the Divine Bosom, which no Clouds of Ignorance can darken, nor Storms of Temptation discompose.

These Perfections of the Divine Nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint Shadow. The Justice of Men is, at one time, severe, at another, relenting: their Goodness is sometimes confined to a partial Fondness for few; sometimes runs out into a blind Indulgence towards all. But, Goodness and Justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady Principles of Action, which, (enlightened by perfect Wisdom, and never either warped by Partiality, or disturbed by Passion,) perseveres in one regular & constant Tenour. Among Men, they may sometimes break forth with transient Splendour, like wandering Meteors which illuminate, for a little, the Darkness of the Night. but, in God, they shine with that uniform Brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal Lustre of the highest Heavens.

Serm. XXVIII, From

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cessary, (in the Sense of Necessity *We are now speaking of*;) that Things should be made at such a Time, and continue so long, and indued with various Perfections in such Degrees, as Infinite Wisdom & Goodness saw it Wise and Best that they should. And *as* and *as* things are in Being, the same Moral Perfections make it Necessary, that they should be disposed and governed according to the exactest & most unchangeable Laws of Eternal Justice, & Goodness, and Truth; Because, while Things and their *several Relations* are, they cannot but be what they are; and an Infinitely Wise Being, cannot but know them to be what they are, & judge always rightly concerning the several Fitnesses or Unfitnesses of them; and an Infinitely Good Being, cannot but *choose* to *do* always according to his Knowledge of the respective Fitnesses of Things: It being as truly impossible for such a *Free Agent*, who is absolutely incapable of being Deceived or Depraved, to *choose*, (by acting contrary to these Laws,) to destroy its own Perfections; as for *Necessity* Existence to be able to destroy its own Being.

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(A) "Whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever: Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doth it, that Men should fear before him."

377

First, The Author of all things being, (in himself,) possessed of all Perfections, must be unchangeable; he cannot change for the Better, because he hath already, in himself, all Excellencies.

He

(A) THE ALL the Actions of God, are entirely Free; and consequently the Necessity of his Moral Attributes cannot be said to be Necessary, in the same Sense of Necessity, as his Existence and Eternality; yet these Moral Attributes are really and truly Necessary, by such a Necessity, as tho' it be not at all inconsistent with Liberty, yet is equally Certain, Infallible, and to be depended upon, as even the Existence itself, or the Eternity of God. For, tho' nothing is more Certain than that God acts, *not necessarily*, but *voluntarily*, with particular Intention & Design, knowing that he does Good, & intending to do so, freely & out of Choice, & when he has no other Constraint upon him but this, that his Goodness inclines his Will to communicate himself and to do Good; so that the Divine Nature is under no Necessary, but such as is consistent with the most perfect Liberty and free Choice. This is the Ground of all our Prayers and Thanksgivings; The Reason why we pray to him to bestow mercies and graces; and thank him for being good and merciful; whereas no Man prays to him to be Omnipotent, or thank him for being Omnipotent, or for having infinite Power.

THAT therefore, nothing is more certain, than that God acts, not necessarily, but voluntarily; yet it is inconsistent as well as repugnant, supposable for God not to do, (or to do any thing contrary to) what his Moral Attributes require him to do; as if he were angry, yet if free, but a necessary Agent. The Reason is plain: Because Infinite Knowledge, Power, and Goodness in Conjunction, may, notwithstanding the most perfect Freedom and Liberty, YET WHEN altogether as much Goodness and Merciful Inclining; as ever the Necessity of Pain can be supposed to do. Indeed, such Perfection cannot possibly but be free, because Free Choice is a Being of Infinite Knowledge, Power, & Goodness; and so much more is it contrary to their Perfection, than Knowledge can be Ignorance, Power be Weakness, or Goodness be Evil. So that Free Choice, in such a Being, may be as Certain & Sure as Principles of Action, as the Necessity of Pain. For the only Foundation of this Necessity, is such an unchangeable Relation of WILL, and Perfection of Wisdom, as makes it impossible for a better Being to offend against anything, or do otherwise infinitely Good, than he who is infinitely Wise, Powerful, and Merciful; therefore, as certainly and infallibly true, as

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, [viz] that in the Course of his Operations towards Mankind, in his Councils & Decrees, in his Laws, his Promises & Threatnings, there is no Variableness, nor Shadow of turning" with the Almighty, "Known to him from the Beginning were all his Works." In the Divine Idea the whole System of Nature existed, long before the Foundations of the Earth were laid. When he said "Let there be light," he only realized the great Plan which from everlasting, he had formed in his own Mind. Fore-seen by him was every Resolution which the Course of Ages was to produce. Whatever the Counsels of Men can effect, was comprehended in his Decree. No new Emergency can arise to surprize him. No Agitations of Anger or Sorrow, of Fear or Hope, can shake his Mind, or influence his Conduct. He rests in the eternal Possession of that supreme Beatitude, which neither the Virtues nor Vices of Men can in the least affect. From a Motive of overflowing Goodness, he reared-up the Universe; and, (as the eternal Lover of Righteousness,) he rules it. The whole System of his Government is fixed; his Laws are irrevocable, and what he once loveth, he loveth to the End, (A) All

(A) "Whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever: Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doth it, that Men should fear before him."

the *Moral*, as upon the *Natural Attributes of God* : It being as absurdly impossible for Him to be contrary to the One, as to Divert himself, of the Other ; and as much a Contradiction, to suppose him Choosing to Do any thing inconsistent with his Justice, Goodness & Truth ; as to suppose him divested of Infinity, Power, or Existence. The One is, contrary to the *Immediate and Absolute Necessity of his Nature* ; The Other, to the unalterable *Requitude of his Will*. The One, is in itself an *Immediate Contradiction in the Term* ; The Other is an *express Contradiction to the Necessary Perfection of the Divine Nature*. To suppose the One, is saying absolutely that *Something is, at the same Time that it is not* : To suppose the Other, is to say that *Infinite Knowledge can be Ignorantly, Infinite Power Weakly, or that Infinite Wisdom and Goodness can do things Not Good or Wise to be done*. All which are equally great, and equally manifest Absurdities.

And All Atheistical Persons, therefore, who, tho' fully convinced that there must needs be in the Universe some one Eternal, Necessary, Infinite and All-powerful Being; will yet with unreasonable Obstinacy contend, that they can by no Means see any necessary Connection of *Goodness, Justice, or any other Moral Attribute*, with these Natural Perfections, may be convinced in this Matter, from the particular Deduction of the Moral Attributes, as have done.

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He cannot change for the Worse, because he can neither have a Will, nor a Power to hurt himself; nor are other Beings able to hurt him, or diminish from his Perfections. Since they have no other Strength or Power than what he gave them, and do all receive their Nature, their Qualities, & Perfections from him. Besides,

Nothing argues greater Weakness and Imperfection, than Inconstancy and Change.

This is the great Vanity of all Creatures, that they are UNCERTAIN.

This is the Vanity of the World in general, that "the Fashion of it passeth-away," and of Man in particular, who is liable to so many natural Changes by Age, by Diseases, and Death, that, (agreeable to the Expression of the Psalmist of him,) in his best Estate, "he is altogether Vanity." All things about us are in a perpetual Flux. As to our souls, we know very little of their Essence; It is Consciousness only which gives us an Idea of personal Identity; but in the Exercise of our rational Powers we find a very great Variation, being deluded and deceived in our Understanding, & so often changeable in our Purposes & Resolutions, according to the Alteration, or Appearances of things, that we are very fitly represented by the Apostle, as "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind."

All

All these are Marks of Imperfection, and it does not appear that any finite Being can be altogether free from them. But,

It is not so with the First Cause, the Original, Self-Sufficient and underived Fountain of Being, whose Essence cannot be capable of any Alteration, nor do his Power and Perfections vary with the Changes of Time. If they could, it would cast an universal Cloud upon all the Divine Perfections, and obscure all his other Attributes; and make them like the Flower of the Field, which, (however gay, flourishing, or glorious,) is yet fading and of no Continuance; and the greater the divine Perfections are, the greater Imperfection would Mutability be; for, as the Corruption of the Best things is the Worst; so, the Better any thing is, the Worse it would be to have it liable to Corruption and Change. Therefore,

It is a very amiable Representation which the Scripture gives us of the Justice of God, that it is like "the Great Mountains," steadfast and unmoveable; — of his Truth, that "it endureth forever;" and of his Goodness, that it is "continual." "Every good and perfect Gift cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning." Again,

As the Mutability of God would darken all his other Perfections, so would it take away the Foundation and Comfort of all Religion. The Ground of our Faith, of our Hope, and Fear — the Ground of our Love and Esteem of God would also cease with it. — We could have no great Honour or Regard for a Being that is as fickle, and inconstant as ourselves. — If his Power & Justice were uncertain, his Threatnings would, in a great Measure, lose their Force with us. — If his Truth & Faithfulness could fail, no Promises nor Declarations, (how gracious soever,) would be any Security, or firm Ground of Trust and Confidence to us.

This Reasoning is not the Result of divine Revelation, but is clearly founded in the natural Notions of our own minds, as might be made sufficiently apparent, by citing some few Testimonies to this Purpose, from those who had no other Guide but Natural-Light to direct them.

"God, (say the Heathen Philosophers,) is always the same." — "Is always alike." — "That which is the best and most perfect Being, is not liable to any Alteration, & such a Being is God." (A) He

(A) Immutability is, indeed, so closely connected with the Notion of supreme Perfection, that wherever any rational Concepts

— "He cannot be changed by any thing." — "He cannot will to change himself."

Of the Immutability of God's Councils they speak thus: "The Gods make unchangeable Decrees, and never repent of their first Design."

Thus Reason hath taught all Men to conclude that God is unchangeable. But,

Secondly, The holy Scriptures also teach us the same; they do not; indeed, often enter into the philosophical Part of this Speculation, and endeavour to prove by strict & methodical Reasonings, that it must be so; but they affirm that it is so in very strong Expressions. They tell us that God is unchangeable in his Nature and Perfections, in all his Decrees, Purposes, and Promises. As first,

In his Essence and Being. God speaks thus of himself; "I am, that I am." — The Name which he taketh to himself is, "I am:" — "This is his Name whereby he is called thro all Generations." — Of other things, some have been, and others shall be; but "This is He which is, and which was, and which is to come," the UNCHANGEABLE. All

ons of a Deity have taken place, this Attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the Wise and Reflecting in every Age to believe that, as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect cannot vary, & that the great Governour of the Universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

Serm. XXVIII.

All Time is his; it is measured out by him in limited Portions to the various Orders of created Beings; but his own Existence fills equally every Point of Duration, "the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the same Yesterday, to Day, and Forever."

"I am the Lord, I change not."

From Everlasting, therefore, to Everlasting, thou art God," "Thou art the same, & thy Years fail not." — "Every good and perfect Gift is from above, & cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning."

God is immutable likewise in his Perfections. Hence it is so often said in the Psalms, that "his Goodness and Mercy endure for ever;" and his Righteousness also — They are like the great Mountains, not only visible and conspicuous, but also firm and immoveable. — The same likewise is said of his Truth and Faithfulness: "His Righteousness endureth for ever," and "his Truth or Faithfulness, from Generation to Generation;" and of his Power, it is said, that "in the Lord Jehovah is Everlasting Strength." So likewise is he in his Decrees and Purposes. "The Council of the Lord standeth forever, & the Thoughts of his Heart to all Generations."

"Surely,

"Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, & as I have purposed, so shall it stand." "God is not a Man that he should lie, or as the Son of Man that he should repent." "Hath he spoken, and shall he not do it?" "Or, hath he said, & shall he not bring it to pass?"

If he hath made any Promise, or entered into any Covenant with us, it is firm and immutable: "He will not suffer his Faithfulness to fail; his Covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his Mouth." His Covenant and Promise are in themselves immutable; "are in him, Yea, and Amen." "The same Yesterday, to-Day, and For-ever." And,

For our further Assurance in this, God hath given us his Oath, the highest Sign and Assurance of Immutability. So the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, "that by two immutable Signs, [viz] his Promise and Oath, (in which it is impossible for God to lie,) we might have strong Consolation, who have fled for Refuge to the Hope which is set before us."

God then is immutable, not subject to any Change, with respect either to his Essence, being an incorruptible Spirit; - or his Knowledge, being Omniscient; - or, in respect to Duration, being Eternal; - or, in regard to Place, being Omnipresent; but especially

ally in regard to his Will and Purpose, wherein is "no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning;" all Change being in the Creature, but never in the Creator, to which his Perfection is an invincible Bar. - A Change for the Better, arguing him not perfect before; and a Change for the Worse, making him cease to be perfect afterwards; therefore he saith of himself, "I am the Lord, I change not."

God, then, as to his Perfections and Counsels, Promises and Threats, is immutable. But,

To reconcile this to those Scriptures and Examples, in which God seems to vary from his Promises, reverse his Sayings, and to repent of the Kindness he had done, or of the Evil he had threatened to others, we must carefully attend,

III. To the Answers we shall give to the Objections which have been made against this Attribute of God's Immutability. And here,

It hath been Objected and said, that "God repented that he had made Man;" — that "he repented that he had made Saul King." — "When the Angel stretched-out his Hand over Jerusalem, to destroy it," it is said, that "the Lord repented him of the Evil," — with other similar Quotations which might here be produced, To

To all which we answer, that we are to understand these Expressions of God's Repentance, after "the Manner of Men," and as spoken by Way of Condescension and Accommodation to our weak Capacity; & not as casting any Imputation of Mutability and Inconstancy upon God; as if, out of Levity, or for Want of Fore-Sight, he altered his Mind.

When God, therefore, is said to "repent that he made Man;" or the like, the Change was not in Him, but them: It doth not signify that God was absolutely deceived in his Expectation; but that Things had fallen out contrary to all reasonable Supposal: and therefore, the Scripture cloaths God with the human Passion, of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as we usually do when we are greatly disappointed and fall-short of our Hope and Desire. (A)

(A) By the Expressions of God's *grieving* and *repenting*, (as sometimes mentioned in Scripture,) we are to understand them as employed for Accommodation to common Conception; in the same manner as when Bodily Organs are affected with the chilling Influence of a cold Sort of Philosophy, which, while it pretends to exempt Almighty God from human Passions, really deprives him of the proper Perfections of his Nature, and leaves him an indifferent and inactive Being; than which nothing can be a greater Derogation from his Honour.

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The Scripture, as a Rule of Life addressed to the World, must make use of the Language of Men. — The Divine Nature, represented in its real Sublimity, would have transcended all human Conception.

Tho' there is not any thing of what we properly call Passion in the divine Nature, yet there is something of a superior & infinitely transcending Kind, [viz] the strong and vigorous Affection to Good, or Renunciation of Evil, in his Will, which he can no more suspend or interrupt than he can his very Being. For we must take care of the

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-13- As for the other Instances, in which God is said to repent him of the Evils threatened, we are to observe, that all God's Covenants & Promises, made to Man, and all his Threats against him, (which refer only to this Life, in which Man still continues in a State of Trial,) though in Words they may be sometimes absolute, yet in Sense they are conditional. God's Threats and Promises have always a Regard to the Behaviour of Men, and have a Condition implied, if not expressed; (A) so that those who fall-off from Virtue to Vice, instead of being Heirs to his Promises, become entitled to his Threats; and those who return from Vice to Virtue, instead of being obnoxious to his Threats, become entitled to his Promises.

The Change is not in God, but us.

This doth not in any way derogate from the Constancy and Immutability of God. For,

When God did promise or threaten, he spake what he did really purpose and intend, if something did not intervene to prevent it.

Whence

(A) That Sinners are not to be absolutely and indifferently pardoned, and received to Grace and Favour, appears, as from the whole Scope of the Gospel, so particularly from the Apostle's calling the Christian Dispensation, (Rom. 11, 27.) a COVENANT; which, in its Nature and primary Notion, implies a mutual Obligation between the Parties entering into it.

Whence it is evident, that the Promises made by God to righteous Persons, are only made to them upon Condition, as "not turning away from their Righteousness, to commit Iniquity"; and, The Evils threatened to the Wicked are only threatened to them, when not "turning away from their Iniquity, to do that which is lawful & right."

Whence it is also evident, that when the Promises of God, (made to the Righteous,) are not performed, or his Threats against the Wicked are not executed, this doth not happen through any Change in God, but only thro' a Change in Man; the Promise only failing because they to whom it was made, cease to be the proper Objects of it, by ceasing to be same righteous Persons which they were before: The evil threatened being reversed, because they, (to whom it was threatened,) cease to be the impenitent Sinners they formerly were, and so cease to be the proper Objects of those Threats.

God suits his Dispositions to the Alterations which take place in the Characters of Men. His Disposition towards Good and Evil continues the same, but varies in it's Application as it's Objects vary.

In Proof of which divers Instances might be produced, as in the Case of Eli, and of Nineveh, particularly that famous Passage recorded in Jeremiah, **Serm. XXVIII.** "At

"At what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck-up, and to pull-down, and to destroy it: - If that Nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil, that I thought to do unto them. And,

"At what Instant, I shall speak concerning a Kingdom, to build and to plant it: If it do Evil in my Sight, that it obey not my Voice, then I will repent of the Good wherewith I said I would do them."

To the like Purpose we have it recorded in Ezekiel :

"When a Righteous-Man turneth away from his Righteousness, and committeth Iniquity, and dieth in them; for his Iniquity that he hath done, shall he die." Again,

"When the Wicked Man turneth away from his Wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is Lawful and Right, he shall save his Soul alive."

In both Passages declaring the Reversion of Sentence, upon Reversion of Life and Manners, agreeably to the repeated Declarations of our Saviour, of "rendering to every Man according to his Works."

The immutable Purpose and Decree of the Almighty, the fixed and established Rule of God, is to pursue Virtue with Reward, with Praise and Approbation;

probation; and Vice with Punishment & Disgrace, through all the varying Scenes of Man's Behaviour; which, therefore, we must constantly expect; and, therefore, upon a Change in That, he alters his Measures, not thereby becoming mutable, but continuing constant to his first Resolution of punishing the Wicked, and rewarding the Good.

God's Affection towards Good or Evil, Virtue or Vice, is, therefore, uniform and unchangeable. His Promises and Threatenings invariably follow these Dispensations thro' all the Changes of Man's personal Conduct.

Thus good Parents and Princes, without any Change in themselves, encourage or discourage their respective Children or Subjects, according as they change their Behaviour for the Better or the Worse.

Thus LAWS themselves, which can have no Affection, nor Change of Affection towards one Person or another; (A) yet, vary their Effect, themselves

(A) All Laws should reach indifferently in their Effects, to every Individual of a People, as they all share in one common Nature.

If it is partial to particular Branches, there had better be none at all; since an excepted Liberty to some, only aggravates the Misfortune of others who are deprived of it, by setting before them a disagreeable Subject of Comparison. — See Knox's Essays, No. 121.

On the Animosity occasioned in the Country by the GAME LAWS

Serm. XXVIII.

selves remaining unvaried, and bring Punishments or Rewards according to the different Behaviour of the Person upon whom they are executed; only, with this Difference, that Laws can make no Allowance for the After-Repentance of Men; & that, because the Enactors of the Laws themselves cannot ascertain the Reality of it. But,

God is free from this Imperfection, and inspects and sees every thing really as it is, thro all the varying Circumstances of their Alterations, and therefore acts uniformly, according to the first Purposes of his Will, without Change or Variation, as FIRE, with one unvaried Action, consumes the Dross, but purifies and refines the finer Gold; — and the same SUN, with one continual Heat, melts one Sort of Bodies, but hardens another; — so God, without any Change or Alteration in himself, punishes the Wicked, when they so continue, and shows Compassion towards the same Persons, when they become truly & sincerely penitent, according to that standing Rule proclaimed to us in his Holy Word. — “Them that honour me I will honour, & they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

God is now what he ever was, and ever will be, the same implacable Enemy to Sin, and Terror to all impenitent Sinners; the same faithful Friend to Virtue, affording Consolation to good Men to trust

in, and rely upon him; giving the same Encouragement to all to become such, in order to come up to the divine Terms of Reconciliation, which it is impossible to alter.

On the same Subject

Matth. iii. 6 "I am the Lord, I have come."

Sermon

The Doctrine of God's immutability being already established, what remains is to apply the same. And here,

It will be proper to begin this part of the Discourse by removing an Objection which has been advanced in opposition to the doctrine of God's immutability, and in particular against the doctrine of his immutability in his promises.

To what purpose? (it may be asked) is it necessary to a being whose promises are unchangeably fixed, to whom our obligations are extended, that he should be immovable? we can certainly not by any suppositions incline to it.

The Objection would have been still more religious and pious were it directed to what any Christian or God

(A) The ancient objection is contained in these words: "I am the Lord, I have come."

SERMON XXIX.

On the same Subject.

Malachi iii. 6. "I am the Lord, I change not."

The Doctrine of God's Immutability being already established, what remains, is, to apply the same. And here,

It will be proper to begin this Part of the Discourse by removing an Objection which the Doctrine advanced may appear to form against religious Services; and, in particular, against the Duty of Prayer.

To what Purpose, (it may be urged,) is Homage addressed to a Being whose Purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom "our Righteousness extendeth not;" whom by no Arguments we can persuade, nor by any Supplications mollify? (A)

The Objection would have Weight, if our religious Addresses were designed to work any Alteration on God

(A) The ancient Objection is couched in these Words:

Dejine Fata Deum seſſi ſperare precando.

God; either by giving him any Information of what he did not know; or by exciting Affections which before he did not possess; or by inducing him to change the Measures which he had previously form'd. But, they are only crude and imperfect Notions of Religion which can suggest such Ideas. The Change which our Devotions are intended to make, are upon Ourselves, not upon the Almighty. Their chief Efficacy is derived from the good Dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human Soul.

By pouring out pious Sentiments and Desires before God, by adoring his Perfections, and confessing our own Unworthiness, by expressing our Dependence on his Aid, our Gratitude for his past Favours, our Submission to his present Will, and Trust in his Future-Mercy, we cultivate such Affections as are becoming us to God-Ward.

God hath expressly required this Duty from us, and our Saviour hath as frequently inculcated it; and, to help our Infirmities, hath left us a most admirable Pattern for our Petitions: Accordingly, frequent Assurances are given us in Scripture, that the Prayers of sincere Worshipers, (when offered thro' the Merits of our Redeemer,) shall be productive of the happiest Effects. "When they ask they shall receive; - when they seek, they shall find; - when they knock, it shall be opened unto them."

Serm. XXIX.

Prayer

Prayer is appointed to be the Channel for conveying the Divine Grace to Mankind, because the Wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful Means of improving the human Heart. When religious Homage is considered in this Light, as the great Instrument of spiritual & moral Improvement, all the Objections which Speculation can form from the Divine Immutability, conclude with no more Force against Prayer, than against every other Mean of Improvement, spiritual or temporal, which Reason has suggested to Man. He who decrees the End, certainly requires the Means; in the diligent Improvement of which the chief Exertions of human Wisdom, and human Duty consist.

Assuming it, then, for an undoubted Principle, that Religion is a reasonable Service, and that tho' with God there is no Variableness, the Homage of his Creatures is, nevertheless, for the wisest Reasons, required by him, I proceed to show what Sentiments the Contemplation of the divine Immutability should raise in our Minds, and what Duties it should chiefly enforce. And,

First, Let it excite us to admire and adore.

Filled with profound Reverence, let us look up to the supreme Being, who sits from Everlasting on the

the Throne of the Universe, moving all things, remaining himself unmoved, directing every Revolution of the Creation, but himself affected by no Revolutions either of Events or Time. — Amidst the Changes of perishing Nature, his Glory and Felicity remain unaltered.

The View of great and stupendous Objects, in the natural World, strikes the Mind with solemn Awe, What Veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the Contemplation of an Object so sublime as the eternal & unchangeable Ruler of the Universe! The Composure and Stillness of Thought, introduced by such a Meditation, has a powerful Tendency both to purify and elevate the Heart. It effaces, for a Time, those trivial Ideas, and extinguishes those low Passions, which arise from the Circle of vain and passing Objects around us. It opens the Mind to all the Sentiments of Devotion, and accompanies Devotion with that profound Reverence, which guards it from every improper Excess. (A)

When

(A) When we consider the supreme Being as employed in Works of Love; — When we think of his Condescension to the human Race, in sending his Son to dwell on Earth; encouraged by Favours, and warmed by Gratitude, we are sometimes in Danger of presuming too much on his Goodness, and of indulging a certain Fondness of Affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent State.

It is necessary, therefore, that his should appear to our Minds in

Serm. XXIX.

all

When from the Adoration of the unchangeable Perfection of the Almighty, we return to the View of our own State, the first Sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of Self-Abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little Distinctions which we possess; & to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But,

What is Man, with all his Advantages and boasted Powers, before the Eternal God, who is UN-CHANGEABLE?

With God there is no Variableness; with Man there is no Stability. Virtue and Vice divide the Empire of his Mind; and Wisdom and Folly alternately rule him.

Hence he is changeable in his Designs, fickle in his Friendships, fluctuating in his whole Character, His Life is a Series of Contradictions. We are really most imperfect in all Respects; - in our Bodies,

which all that Majesty with which the Immutability of his Nature cloaths him, in order that Reverence may be combined with Love; and that a Mixture of sacred Awe may chasten the rapturous Effusions of warm Devotion. Servile Fear, indeed, would crush the Spirit of ingenious and affectionate Homage. But that Reverence which springs from elevated Conceptions of the Divine Nature, has a happy Effect in checking the Forwardness of Imagination, restraining our Affections within due Bounds, and composing our Thoughts at the same Time that it exalts them.

which lie exposed to a thousand dangerous Impressions and Accidents from the things around us ; - in our Understandings , which are liable to Error , - in our Memory , which often fails and forsakes us ; and in our good Dispositions , which , (at the best,) are not steady and uniform, but mixed & sullied with many Faults and Defects.

Man, thus variable and unequal himself, is surrounded with fleeting Objects ; our Friends and Fortunes are most uncertain Possessions ; - we are placed in the midst of a Torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps it's Place. We have hardly Time to contemplate this Scene of Vicissitude, before we too are swept-away . Thus circumstanced in Ourselves and in all the Objects with which we are connected, let us be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the Contemplation of the unchangeable Glory of our Creator inspire us with Sentiments of due Submission. Let it teach us to know our Place, and check that Vanity which is so ready to betray us into Guilt. But,

Secondly, Let the Consideration of the Divine Immutability convince us, that the Method of attaining the Favour of Heaven is ONE and INVARIABLE. Were the Almighty a capricious and inconsistent Being, like Man, we should be at a Loss what

Serm. XXIX. Tenour

Tenour of Conduct to hold.

In Order to conciliate his Grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed Principle of his Inclination, sometimes to another: and bewildered amidst various Attempts, would be overwhelmed with Dismay.

It is our peculiar happiness therefore, under the Gospel, to have God revealed to us in his genuine Character of Immutability. We know that at no Time there is any Change, either in his Affections, or in the Plan of his Administration.

One Light always shines upon us from Above. One clear and direct Path is always pointed out to Man. The Supreme Being is, and ever will be, the Supporter of Order and Virtue; "the righteous Lord loving Righteousness." The external Forms of Religion may vary; but, under all Dispensations which proceed from God, it's Substance is the same. It tends continually to One Point, [viz] the Purification of Man's Heart and Life.

This was the Object of the original Law of Nature. This was the Scope of the Mosaic Institution amidst all it's Sacrifices and Rites; and this is unquestionably the End of the Gospel. So invariably constant is God to this Purpose, that the Dispensation of Mercy in Christ Jesus, (which admits of the Vicarious-Atonement and Righteousness of a Redeemer

Redeemer,) makes no Change in our Obligation to fulfill the Duties of a good Life. The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the End of Time the Moral-Law continues in it's full Force; and that "till Heaven & Earth pass-away, One Jot or Tittle shall in no ways pass from it." This is the only Institution known to Men, whose Authority is unchanging and constant. Human Laws rise and fall with the Empires that gave them Birth. - Systems of Philosophy vary with the Progress of Knowledge and Light. - Manners, Sentiments and Opinions, alter with the Course of Time. But, throughout all Ages, and amidst all Revolutions, the Rule of Moral and Religious Conduct is the same. It partakes of that Immutability of the divine Nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first Worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this Day, to us; and such it will remain thro succeeding Ages to our Posterity forever, (A)

The Use of this Consideration is two-fold: as it is full of Comfort to the Good, so it is equally full of Terror to the Wicked, whilst they continue in their evil Ways; since the Almighty, sin-revenging God, must, (in this case,) be unchangeably their Enemy; For, If

If God be unchangeably an holy God, he must then be for ever displeased with all the Workers of Iniquity, and so must for ever separate them from his blissful Presence. If he be inflexibly a just God, and an ever righteous Governor, then must he ever deal with wicked Men according to their Works.

"The Lord, indeed, is slow to Anger, and of great Goodness," but if the Patience and Riches of his Forbearance will not lead them to Repentance, he assures them, (in the following words,) that "he will by no Means acquit them."

If he be a God that cannot lie, nor vary from the Truth of any of his Threats, whilst men continue in their Sins, then they must feel the Power of his Wrath, & the Weight of his Almighty Arm.

Let us, therefore, by sincere Repentance and Reformation from our evil ways, prepare ourselves to be the Objects of his Mercy. For,

Let us know assuredly, (whosoever we are,) that if we are obstinately bent to continue in our evil Ways, that God is as fully resolved to make us the Objects of his Vengeance; indeed, He will therefore do it, because we hereby presume against Mercy, and hope to escape, though we persevere in Iniquity.

Let

Let but a Sinner consider what God is, and the Consideration of his unchangeable Nature must needs terrify him. For,

He who is Holy, and Just, and Powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter, nor put-off any of those Properties, but will for ever hate Iniquity, and be an implacable Enemy to all Wickedness. And !

Is it not a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of this holy, and just, and omnipotent God, who lives for ever, and can punish for ever ?

"If any Man say, I shall have Peace, though I walk in the Imagination of my Heart, adding Drunkenness to Thirst," going on securely in a Course of Intemperance, or any other Sin, "the Lord will not spare him, but his Anger and his Jealousy shall smoke against him." For, "God hath sworn in his Wrath," that unbelieving and impenitent Sinners "shall not enter into his Rest," and for the greater Assurance of it, & that we may not think there is any Condition implied in these Threatenings, he hath confirmed them by an Oath, "As I live, saith the Lord :" that by this immutable Sign, ("in which it is impossible for God to lie,") Sinners might have strong Terrors, and not be able to fly to any Hopes of Refuge.

Serm. XXIX.

Vain

Vain, therefore, are their Hopes of Mercy, who continue in those Ways to which God threatens the severest of his Judgments. For,

Both his Mercy and his Justice are the Mercy and Justice of a Governor prescribing Rules and Laws, on the Observance of which only he will be merciful; the which, therefore, if we neglect to comply with, "there remains nothing but fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation to consume us."

As God, therefore, is immutable in his Nature, unchangeable in his Holiness, & always acts agreeably to those standing Rules of Righteousness which he hath prescribed in his word, it must be in vain for Sinners to expect his Favour till some Change be wrought in them, or even to imagine, that they shall be able, by their Addresses, to incline him to shew Favours unto them, whilst they continue "Enemies to him by wicked Works."

When we desire that he would do so, we pray against the Purity of his Nature; against the Declarations of his Will, and against the Rules of his Government.

(Since then God changeth not, if we desire that either our Persons or Performances should be accepted by him, there must be a Change in us, [viz]

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in

in our Affections; - from a Love, to an Hatred of every evil Way; - from a Dislike, to an Approbation of the Ways of Piety :

In our Wills; - from a perverse and disobedient, to a willing Heart :

"We must put-off the Old-man with his Works, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful Lusts; and put-on the New-Man, which, (after God,) is created in Righteousness and true Holiness;" and then, that God who is immutable, will be disposed to accept us; and that, because he is unchangeably willing to do good to his Friends, & to shew Kindness to every Soul that truly desires, and uprightly endeavours to serve and please him: for, "God is gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and ready to forgive;" He is unchangeably good, and "his Mercy endureth for ever."

Thus is God gracious and merciful to all who truly turn to him: but if Men will not submit to his Terms, there is nothing before them but everlasting Destruction — "Nothing then remaineth, but a fearful looking-for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation to consume them."

God hath declared to us the Terms of our Pardon and Peace: and if we will not come-up to

them, He is at a Point; He cannot change his Nature, nor will He alter the Terms of our Salvation.

There is a perfect, and an eternal Opposition between the Holy Nature of God, and that of impure Sin.

It is impossible, therefore, that a Sinner should be happy, till the Opposition be removed: And,

To do That, there are but two imaginable Ways, [viz] either by changing God, or Ourselves.

The Nature of God, (as we have already shewn,) is inflexible, fixed and unchangeable; we must, therefore, change Ourselves. God cannot recede from his own pure Nature; therefore, we must part from all our Sinfulness and Corruption.

God cannot quit his Holiness, therefore, we must leave our Sins. Indeed,

Since we can have no Hope to change God, we must, therefore, change Ourselves, and "be Holy as He is Holy," if ever we hope to be happy, as God also is.

Let us, therefore, rectify, (as far as we are able, through the Assistance of the Divine Spirit,) our own corrupt Natures, - renounce all our former Impurities, since the Nature of God is essentially immutable.

God hath once condescended so far, as to take
our

our Nature upon him, to make us capable of Happiness; but, if this will not do, He can go no lower. — He will not, cannot put off his own Nature to save us against our Wills, and please rebellious, incorrigible Sinners. But,

Thirdly, Is God unchangeable in his Nature, Attributes and Counsels? This is a strong Encouragement to continue firm in our Obedience to him; or, (in the words of the Apostle,) to be "steadfast and immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." For,

(As already observed,) all God's Promises of spiritual Blessings to the Righteous, depend on this Condition, that they continue so to be; and therefore, whilst they continue so, they cannot doubt but that this "Giver of every good and perfect Gift," "with whom there is no Variableness, neither Shadow of Turning," will still be ready to give those Gifts to them, as they have need, and are meet to receive them.

God is never wanting in his Grace and Favour to them that love him: "He will give Grace and Glory, and no good thing will He withhold from them that lead a godly Life." But then,

He cannot engage himself to continue his Blessings to him who revolts from his Duty, and who

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Serm. XXIX.

departs

departs from his "Righteousness to commit Iniquity;" for, this is contrary to his express Declaration: "All his Righteousness, that he hath done formerly shall not be mentioned unto him; in his Sin that he hath since sinned, in it shall he die." It is contrary to the Purity of the Divine Nature, and even to the Condition of the New-Covenant, [viz] sincere Obedience and Perseverance in it to the End.

Let us, then, by "patient Continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality;" and the unchangeable Fidelity of God will yield us a firm Assurance of future and complete Happiness; for, "He that endureth unto the End, the same shall be saved." But further,

Let the Contemplation of this Perfection of the Divine Nature teach us to imitate, as far as our Frailty will permit, the Constancy and Steadiness which we adore. All the Attributes of the Supreme Being are Standards of Character towards which we ought to aspire. But,

As in all these Perfections there are Properties peculiar to the Divine Nature, our Endeavours to resemble them are laid under great Restrictions by the Dissimilarity between our Nature and the Divine. With respect to that Attribute which we

now consider, the Circumstances are evident which preclude improper Imitation.

As Unchangeableness is an Excellency and Perfection in God, so to be fixed and constant in all that is good, in our Love of Virtue, and in all our lawful Promises to one another, is the Excellency and Perfection of Men: equally, as on the contrary, to change our Opinion & Manner of acting, when there is just Cause so to do, is one of our greatest Commendations. And,

The Reason in both is the same, [viz] that Right and Truth are to be followed unchangeably. As therefore, God, who never can err in his Judgment of Right and Truth, must consequently be unchangeable in his acting according to it: — so, (for the same Reason,) frail and fallible Man, whenever he finds he has erred from what is true and right, must immediately return to it: (A) But,

In

(A) Antiquity should not sanction and privilege an Error, neither should Novelty prejudice us against any thing which is just and true. Men of the greatest Depth and Wisdom have no infallible Security against making, &c. [under]

recover from it, there being commonly more Merit in a judicious Disengagement from a Labyrinth, than in the first Advance of a Fault. — We pity the Man who is first disconcerted, but by no Means Him, who, by an unreasonable Obstinacy, gives the finishing Stroke to his own Ruin, when he might easily have restored Matters by following a

Serm. XXIX.

contrary

In things certainly and demonstrably true; and which, upon the fullest, clearest, and most careful Examination, are found evidently and undeniably good, in these things Men ought to persevere inviolably; to be "steadfast and unmoveable," (A)

contrary Conduct. See No. 381 of the Spectator.

A Man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the Wrong, for it is but saying that he is wiser Now, than he was Heretofore.

He that is in an Error, cannot rightly justify himself, but by immediately forsaking it. — This Yielding is glorious, and to be overcome by Truth, is honourable: Whilst he that perseveres in a Fault, is doubly faulty. — *Par est et ad Hæc deceri.*

(A) Zeal is an earnest Concern for, or against something, and in a close Pursuit of it; and, in its own Nature, indifferent, like the rest of the Passions; but good or bad, according to the Object and Degree of it. — It is used in the Holy Scriptures, in a good Sense, when applied to those things where the Honour of God, and the Salvation of Souls are concerned; but, in a bad Sense, when applied to a furious Spirit of Persecution, and such Contentions and Divisions as produce Wrath and Envy.

Zeal, therefore, in order that it may become a Christian Virtue, ought always to be right in Respect of its Object, that what we contend for, be certainly and considerably Good; and that what we oppose, be certainly & considerably Evil: That the Measure & Degree of it be proportioned to the Good and Evil of things about which it is conversant; and that it be always pursued by lawful and warrantable Means; since no Zeal for God and his Glory, for his true Church and Religion, will justify the doing of that which is morally, and in itself Evil: [viz] when we violently contend for any Doctrine that is erroneous, and are more earnestly concerned for the External of Religion, than for solid and real Goodness, which they were designed to work

firm without wavering; and "not to be like Children tossed to & fro with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Slight of Men, & Cunning-Craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." For,

Jesus Christ, (i.e.) the Doctrine and Gospel of Christ, is "the same Yesterday, to-Day, & Forever."

"Be not, therefore, (saith the Apostle,) carried about with diverse and strange Doctrines, for it is a good thing that the Heart be established with Grace." The

in us; - when it betrays us to the Breach of any of God's Laws, in order to promote his Glory; and creates Divisions and Schisms in the Church.

Zeal in a good Cause is commendable; but should still be consistent with Charity; for, even Truth itself may be prosecuted without that Meekness & Charity which are essential to the Character of a true Christian; and we have more Reason to take care how we govern our Zeal, because Moses himself, (eminent for his Meekness,) when zealous for God, "at the Waters of Meribah, was so provoked, that he spake unadvisedly with his Lips." So that if our Zeal for God be not well-tempered, we may, with "that great Prophet, break the Tables of the Law, and throw them out of our Hands, with Zeal to have them preserved.

With a manly & intrepid Spirit, - with a fervent and enlightned Zeal, we should persevere to the last for the Honour of God, in the Cause of Virtue and Religion. This Zeal ought to be the Principle of our Actions, as it makes them good and agreeable to God, and as we thereby manifest that we love God & Virtue above all things.

The immutable Rectitude of the Deity should lead us to aspire after Fixedness of Principle, and Uniformity in Conduct, as the Glory of the Rational-Nature.

Impressed with the Sense of that Supreme Excellence which results from unchanging Goodness, Faithfulness and Truth, let us become ashamed of that Levity which degrades the human Character. Let us "ponder well our Paths," act upon a well-regulated Plan, and remain consistent with Ourselves. Let us establish our Heart in that which is Right, and then the greatest of human Praise is to be IMMOVEABLE. (A) But,

Lastly, The Immutability of God will minister strong Consolation to good Men in all the Changes and Vicissitudes of the World.

This is One of the chief Improvements to be made of the Subject, and therefore, requires full Illustration.

There are three Lights in which we may view the Benefit redounding to us from the Attribute before us.

It assures us of the Constancy of Nature; of the regular Administration of Providence; and of the certain,

(A) See the Discourse on Inconstancy, in this Work.

† certain Accomplishment of all the Divine Promises,

On the Unchangeableness of God rests the Stability of the Universe, and the constant and uniform Course of Nature.

What we call the Laws of Nature, are no other than the Decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because He is immutable, that those Laws have continued the same since the World began; that the Sun so constantly observes his Course; that the Seasons regularly return; and the Earth, at stated Intervals, yields her Increase; and the human Body, and mental Powers, advance to Maturity by a regular Progress. In all these Motions and Operations which are incessantly going on throughout Nature, there is no Stop nor Interruption; no Change nor Innovation; nor Deflection from their main Scope. The same powerful & steady Hand which gave the first Impulse to the Powers of Nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed Line. Hence arises the chief Comfort of our present Life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly World. We look forward to known Succession of Events. We are enabled to form Plans of Action. From the Cause we calculate the Effect: And from the Past, we reason with

Serm. XXIX. Confidence

Confidence concerning the Future! (A)

Accustomed from our Infancy to this Constancy in Nature, we are hardly sensible of the Blessing. Familiarity has the same Effect here, as in many other Enjoyments, to efface Gratitude. But, let us for a Moment take an opposite View of things, and suppose Capriciousness or Change in the Power who rules the Course of Nature; that things either failed, or altered from the Customs in which we behold them. What Dismay would instantly fill our Hearts! and what Horror over-spread the whole Face of Nature! The present Abode of Man would then become, as Job describes the Region of the Grave, "a Land of Darkness, as Darkness itself, and the Shadow of Death; without any Order; and where the Light is as Darkness." With what Joy, then, ought we to recognize an unvarying and steadfast Ruler! under whose Dominion we have no such Disasters to dread; but can depend on the Course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the Period shall arrive of it's final Dissolution! But,

Tho the great Laws of Nature be constant like their Author; yet, in the Affairs of Men there is

(A) He, who studies Nature's Laws,
From certain Truth, his Maxims draws.

much Variety and Change. All that regards our present Possessions and Enjoyments was, (for wise Reasons,) left, in great Measure, uncertain; and from this Uncertainty arise the Distresses of human Life. Sensible of the Changes to which we are liable, we look round with anxious Eyes, and eagerly grasp at every Object which appears to promise us Security. But, in vain is the whole Circle of human things explored with this View. There is nothing on Earth so stable, as to assure us of undisturbed Rest; nor so powerful, as to afford us constant Protection. Time, Death and Change, triumph over all the Labours of Men: the whole Scenery of Life is continually shifting around us. Amidst these endless Vicissitudes, what can give any firm Consolation, any satisfying Rest to the Heart, except the Dominion of an immutably wise & righteous Sovereign? Though all things change, and we ourselves are involved in the general Mutability; yet, so long as there is a fixed and permanent Goodness at the Head of the Universe, we are assured that the great Interests of all good Men will be safe. We know that the Supreme Being loved Righteousness from the Beginning of Days, and that He will continue to love it to the Last. We serve the same God whom our Fathers worshiped, & whom our Posterity shall adore. His

unchanging Dominion comprehends all Events & all Ages; it establishes a connecting Principle which holds together the Past, the Present, and the Future; gives Stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts Order from those which appear most confused. Well, therefore, may "the Earth rejoice, and the Multitude of the Isles be glad," because there reigneth over the Universe such an immutable Lord.

Were we to un-hinge this great Article of Faith; - were we either to "say with the Fool, that there is no God," or to suppose with the Superstitious, that the God who rules, is variable and capricious; we should, indeed, "lay the Axe to the Root of the Tree," and, with one Blow, fell the Hope and Security of Mankind. For, we should then leave nothing in the whole Compass of Nature, but a Round of casual and transitory Existence; no Foundation of Trust, no Protection to the Righteous, no steadfast Principle to uphold and regulate the Succession of things. Mysterious Obscurity would involve the Beginning; - Disorder would mark the Progress; and the Blackness of Darkness would cover the final Result. Whereas,

When Faith enables us to discover an universal Sovereign, whose Power never fails, & whose Wis-

dom

dom and Goodness never change, the Prospect clears up on every Side. A Ray from the great Source of Light seems to illuminate the whole Creation. Good Men discover a Parent & Friend; They attain a Fortrefe in every Danger, a Refuge amidst all Storms. "They are no longer afraid of any evil Tidings, for their Heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Tho these Reasonings, from the unchanging Tenour of Divine Government, cannot but afford much Comfort to good Men; their Satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit Promises which are given them in the Word of God.

The Immutability of the Divine Purpose assures them most perfectly of those Promises being fulfilled in due Time, how adverse soever Circumstances may at present appear to their Accomplishment. "The Strength of Israel will not lye, nor repent; for he is not a Man that he should repent; Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

"God is good to Israel, to them that are true-hearted." Their Expectation relies on the unchangeable Goodness and Faithfulness of that God, "all whose Promises are Yea, and Amen;" Truth

Serm. XXIX.

and

And Verity. (A) All other Supports and Hopes may fail us; but God by no Means can: "He will not suffer his Faithfulness to fail; His Covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his Mouth." Men have the Command only of the present Time: when that is suffered to pass, Changes may befall, either in their own State, or in the "Situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best Intentions in our behalf, and render all their Promises fruitless. Hence, (even setting aside the Danger of human Inconstancy,) the Confidence which we can repose on any earthly Protector is extremely imperfect. Man in his highest Glory, is but a Reed floating on the Stream of Time, and forced to follow every new Direction of the Current. But, "God is the Rock of Ages." All Time is equally in his Hands. Intervening Accidents cannot embarrass him, nor any unforeseen Obstacle retard the Performance of his most distant Promise. "One Day is with the Lord as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as one Day." There is no Vicissitude of the human State in which good Men cannot take Sanctuary with Him, as a sure and abiding

(A) ———— If these fail,

The pillar'd Firmament is Rottensess,
And Earth's Base built on Stubble.

hiding Friend ; the safe Conductor of their Pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal Rest of their Souls hereafter.

We should, therefore, comfort ourselves in all our greatest Necessities and Extremities of Life, with the Consideration of the immutable Goodness and Faithfulness of God. The things of this World are mutable, even those things which seem most constant. Whether we look without us, or within us, we can find no true Ground of Comfort or Confidence.

Without us, we can find nothing but what is subject to change ; Men are inconstant, and Friends are fickle, given to change as Circumstances, Opinions, or Interests vary. Our Riches are uncertain ; St. Paul, therefore, adviseth us "not to trust in them, but in the living God ;" thereby intimating, that He who lives forever, can be the only Foundation of our Comfort, who must live for ever also.

If we look within us, we shall find that we are subject to great Mutability ; we are in a perpetual progressive Change, from Youth to Age, from Health to Sickness, from Life to Death : but still our God is "the same Yesterday, To-Day, and For-ever."

This, therefore, should comfort us in all Changes, that God is still the same. Youth and Health,

Riches and Friends may forsake us; but God hath promised that He will never leave, nor forsake us: "When our Strength and our Heart fail us, and in God the Strength of our Heart, and our Portion for ever. With Him there is no Variation, neither Shadow of turning. He changes not; therefore, He is our Refuge in Times."

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Serm. XXIX.